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**REAPPROPRIATING PUBLIC SPACE:
THE CASE OF URBAN SOCIAL MOVEMENTS IN THE
CITY OF SKOPJE**



PREFACE

I spent the last two years of my life travelling from one place to another, thanks to my studies. In this period I lived on two continents, in three different countries, passed through many cities and was lucky enough to study at three great universities. After this inspiring journey, surprisingly, I ended up writing this thesis about my hometown. But, if the city is as one big house and the house is as one small city,¹ it makes sense that all roads lead me to my “house” – Skopje.

Many people and factors deserve a “thank you note” for helping me finish this work. The activists who agreed to take part in the research, my supervisors for assisting me in the researching and writing process, my family for encouraging me to pursue my ambitions, my friends and flat mates for making this writing period more joyful, the city of Skopje for being my constant inspiration and Ivo, for all the love as well as cooked food in the last weeks of the writing process.

The city of Skopje is not defined by its buildings or other facilities. This city is defined by its inhabitants, with their family ties, labor relations, with their knowledge and actions. It is not made up of the past, but of the present which is continuously being created by the people living in it. Public spaces in the city, such as squares, parks, streets and bridges, which belong to all citizens, should reflect that fact. [...]Let's make this city truly ours.²

Chapter 1: Introduction

Summer 2015– an unlikely occurrence shocked the citizens of Skopje. Videos and pictures of few sharks swimming in the River Vardar in Skopje appeared. “We went totally insane!”; “This is not normal!” and “Best thing that appeared in Skopje!” are only few of the comments on the YouTube video with 263,759 views. The sharks became a one-day sensation, when people were not sure what is really

¹ Ivana Vaseva and Filip Jovanovski, *111 Тези За ГТЦ* (ФРУ-Факултет за работи кои не се учат, 2015).

² Zoran Popovski, "Public Space: Participatory Art Project" *Zoran Popovski artBlog* (blog) accessed 11 July 2016, <http://www.popovski.info/2009/07/public-space-participatory-art-project.html>.

happening. After all, in that same river, the building of a galley was just finished. A galley-restaurant that is. With its depth of around 4 meters, galleys have never sailed through that river. It seemed like the building madness in the capital city of Macedonia went so far, that even sharks swimming in the river was not something unbelievable. However, what later appeared to be the case is that an anonymous artistic group had installed the “sharks” in the river. This action was one of the many that took place around the center of Skopje. Another memorable action also happened in the summer of 2015, when few trees around the city center got a new accessory – a pair of wide-open eyes, looking out for trouble. It was reported that the trees opened their eyes suddenly out of fear to be cut down. These actions are only a minor part of the bigger picture, but they do serve as a good illustration of this type of “out-of-the-box” activism happening in the city of Skopje, the capital of Macedonia. The city streets became witnesses of many urban actions appearing as a response to the complicated political and social reality in the country. Whether engaged in preserving cultural heritage, fighting to save a park or addressing doubtful public policies; activists in the city of Skopje have been working extensively and permanently. The urban mobilization in the city is in constant rise since (roughly speaking) 2010. These actions in the city space do not only speak of the need for independent spaces, culture hubs and green areas. Rather, they speak of wider political, social and economic circumstances that have triggered them. Activists, artists, groups, and individuals have been increasingly addressing political issues in a creative manner in the urban space for more than five years. Nonetheless, the process and reasons behind it have not been researched as a social phenomenon yet. The idea of conducting a research on the rise of urban, creative mobilizations in the city of Skopje, as a context I am very familiar with, has been at the back of my mind throughout my studies. Considering the vast knowledge I have regarding the city’s historical, political and cultural aspects, it made sense to take it into consideration. Moreover, as a transitioning city in a country not yet a part of the European Union³, it seemed more challenging to conduct such research in Skopje, in contrast to other cities in the EU, where civil society is supported and encouraged by the EU (through programs, education, funds). Furthermore, although social and political art is nowadays widely accepted and institutionalized in the EU (by being sponsored and/or supported by public programs as well as museums), in transitioning Skopje, on the other hand, civil engagement is often connected to social protest; making it more politically charged. Along similar lines, as I was reviewing the literature on public space and urban movements, I realized that it mainly focuses on the influence of capitalism on the public space, and the possibility for citizens to influence this space. Nevertheless, the complexity of the post-socialist city is not only in the influence of capitalism, but also the remains of the previous system and the transition which leave specific trademarks on the public space of the city and the relations amongst the citizens. From such a starting point, this thesis

³ hereafter the EU

addresses two research gaps in international but also in Central, Eastern and Southeastern European research literature: the limited attention put on creative urban resistance in the framework of public space theories, in the context of post-socialist cities and the disregard of the continuous rise of urban mobilization in the city of Skopje in recent years as a significant social factor in times of an ongoing political crisis.

This thesis aims at exploring the different aspects of the rise of urban mobilization in the city of Skopje, occurring in the period between 2010 and 2016. The emphasis is put on grassroots activism, carried out in the public space with the use of artistic methods. In order to address this matter I suggest a careful look at urban social movements operating in the urban space of Skopje in a period of an ongoing political crisis. The case study is contextualized through a theoretical framework of public space and creative methods in the service of political engagement. Additionally, a more specific and case sensitive framing is the context of the rise of urban mobilizations in post-socialist Europe, which has already been researched by other authors.

The main research questions that this thesis will address are:

- What are the main aspects and triggers for the rise of urban mobilization in Skopje and in what ways are the urban social movements influencing the public space in Skopje in the period of political crisis?
- What is the position of urban social movements in the city of Skopje in regard to urban movements in other post-socialist cities in Eastern and Central Europe?
 - o in which aspects is activism in Skopje particular or similar in light of the literature on urban mobilization in post-socialist cities?
- Why are activists increasingly using creative activism when addressing public issues?
 - o how do these activists make sense of their actions?
 - o what kind of methods are they using and what are they seeking to achieve?

In order to address these research questions, the suggested methodology for the thesis is qualitative case study with embodied units of analysis. The case study is the rise of urban activism in the city of Skopje in the suggested time frame 2010-2016, and the embodied units of analysis are urban social movements which operated in the public space in this period. The main method for data collection was semi-structured interviews with activists from the selected social movements. A limited amount of field work was conducted and official web pages of the movements were consulted for information. This thesis is structured as follows. After the first, introductory chapter, the theoretical framework is presented, consisting of three themes: 1. Aspects of public space; 2. Theories on urban social movements; 3. Theories on artistic activism. These three themes are meant to set the ground for exploring the main problem of the thesis – the rise of urban social movements in the city of Skopje, with

a focus on the way creative actions are influencing the public space. The concepts “public space”, “urban social movements” and “artistic activism” were identified as key concepts for understanding the main problem of the thesis and thus served as themes for constructing the theoretical framework. In the third chapter, the methodology is discussed. Next, a chapter on the city of Skopje, through the lenses of the theories of the first theme – dimensions of public spaces is presented. The aim of this chapter is to contextualize the urban activism addressed thereafter and make a more detailed introduction to the local context in relation to the first part of the theory. In the fifth chapter, the results of the analysis of activism in Skopje are presented. The results are presented in “discussion” with the second theme of the theoretical chapter – urban social movements. The case study is presented through four themes which are prevalent in the literature consulted on urban social movements in post-socialist Europe. The themes presented are as follows: 1. The negotiation of the urban meaning; 2. The Urban as a Space for Agency and Basis for Citizenship 3. The role and Challenges of Alliance-Building in Urban Mobilizations; and 4. Urban Movements and Local Governance⁴. After the four themes a discussion on the path from creative action to political resistance is discussed, as a specific focus of this thesis. This theme is grounded in the third theme of the theoretical framework, which focuses on the advantages and limitations of artistic activism. An overview of the discussed themes in the chapter will be provided at the end of the fifth chapter. Finally, concluding remarks are presented.

Chapter 2: Theoretical Framework

“Unplanned, unpermitted use of public spaces by assemblies increases their visibility and their often desired disruptive capacity.”⁵

The global wave of grassroots politics opened questions regarding the use and accessibility of public space as a political, urban social and cultural common.⁶ New horizons regarding the understanding of public space has been inspired by worldwide social movements which influence the public space, by often using it creatively. When speaking about social movements today, it is inevitable to first and foremost understand the concept of public space, especially in relation to the local context in which the movements appear. From that perspective, the theoretical framework for this thesis is developed through three themes: public space; urban social movements and artistic activism, which were identified as key concepts in relation to the research problem. The framework is supposed to set the ground for

⁴ Kerstin Jacobsson, “The Development of Urban Movements in Central and Eastern Europe” in *Urban Grassroots Movements in Central and Eastern Europe*, ed. Kerstin Jacobsson, (London and New York: Ashgate Publishing, Ltd., 2015), 1-33.

⁵ Peter Marcuse, “Blog #33 – The Five Paradoxes of Public Space, with Proposals,” *Peter Marcuse’s Blog*, accessed 6 July 2016, <https://pmarcuse.wordpress.com/2013/05/12/blog-33-the-five-paradoxes-of-public-space-with-proposals/>.

⁶ Anna Zhelnina, “‘Hanging Out,’ Creativity, and the Right to the City: Urban Public Space in Russia before and after the Protest Wave of 2011–2012,” *Statis Journal* vol. 2 no.1, (2014).

understanding the rise of urban social movements in the city of Skopje, with a focus on the way creative actions are influencing the public space in the current political setting.

The concept of public space is introduced through general concepts on public space, introducing the political and spatial aspect of the term. Contemporary literature tends to conceptualize the two mentioned aspects of the public space as inseparable parts of the term. This approach is trending within urban and cultural studies as well as right to the city theoreticians such as David Harvey, Don Mitchell and Peter Marcuse, who emphasize the relation between public space and political engagement. Such understanding of public space is enriched with the theory of agonistic public spaces by political theorist Chantal Mouffe, who has introduced conflict as opposed to consensus as a democratic principle. Since models of public space and its use can vary according to social and political factors, a text on public space interpretation in post-socialist cities, with a focus on Russia is discussed as well. The theories of public space are set to contextualize the use of public space by activists in the case of Skopje. The duality of the public space and its relation to political engagement is empirically explored through this case study.



The development of urban activism in Skopje is framed through the literature of social movements, introduced in the second theme of this chapter. The focus is on urban movements and their relation to social change. This part of the theory helped setting the criteria for selecting the movements for the case study of Skopje. An important leap in the social movements' literature is a recently published book, edited by Kerstin Jacobsson which focuses on the new wave of grassroots

activism in post-socialist cities in Central, Eastern and South Eastern Europe⁷. This volume provides analysis of most of the capitals in the region, but almost entirely leaves out the case of Skopje. This thesis analyzes the urban movements in the city of Skopje through the prism of the prevalent themes from the existing literature on grassroots movements in post-socialist cities. By doing so, this thesis explores the extent to which the rise of this type of activism in Skopje follows similar traits as in the rest of the post-socialist space in Europe.

Lastly, a separate section of theory is devoted to artistic activism, starting from the historical roots of this concept in the 20th century avant-garde art to contemporary theories on activism. The aim is to present the lines of correlation between art and activism in theory, before exploring this link empirically in the case study. Even though the presence of artistic activism in Skopje has developed considerably, it has not been researched yet. One of the few exceptions that address public space interventions in the city of Skopje academically is the artist Zoran Popovski. In the article *Spaces of Democracy: Art, Politics, and Artivism in the Post-Socialist City*, he contextualizes activism in Skopje as tool for contesting the implications of ill privatization policies, severely felt in the public space of post-socialist cities.⁸ However, he also argues that despite the fact that activism is noticeably growing, artivism, on the other hand, is less prevalent as a tool for activism in Skopje. This thesis, by analyzing different types of movements operating after 2010, will try to argue that it was exactly alternative, artistic practices which were used increasingly in this period. Through the suggested theoretical framework and empirical study, the thesis will seek to explore how artistic activism is influencing the public space in Skopje according to the activists; why are artistic methods used increasingly; what is the position of urban movements in the city of Skopje in regard to urban movements in other post-socialist cities in Eastern and Central Europe.

2.1. Public Space Dimensions

a. Rational Consensus or Passionate Conflict?

Cities are created, developed, and urbanized by citizens. Therefore, the communication between the city and the person is a two-way street, in which these two actors contribute significantly to the identity of the other and create a relationship of mutual dependence. This dialogue between these two actors requires a natural flow; understanding and continuity, for both of their identities are defined and outlined by the being of the other. The identity of the citizen and that of the city is constructed in the public space, where ideas, symbols and opinions are exposed, commemorated, negotiated, and contested.

⁷ Kerstin Jacobsson, ed, *Urban Grassroots Movements in Central and Eastern Europe* (London and New York: Ashgate Publishing, Ltd., 2015).

⁸ Zoran Popovski, "Spaces of Democracy: Art, Politics, and Artivism in the Post-Socialist City" *Studia Politica Romanian Political Science Review* 11 (2011), 713-723.

From that perspective, the public space can be understood in two ways. On the one hand, there is the spatial, physical dimension of it, as the term itself implies. On the other hand, there is the despatialized side of the concept, which interprets public space as an abstract arena where constant communication and deliberation amongst citizens occurs. This constructs the political dimension of the public space that can be conceptualized as public sphere. These two terms are sometimes used interchangeably, since it is hard to fully separate them. For example, the earliest example of a public space in this sense was the Greek *Agora*, which in the same time represented physical public space, but also democratic arena for debate and conflict.⁹

For the purpose of the thesis, the term public space (and not public sphere) will be used in order to accent the deep tie between the spatial and abstract side of publicness. Such tie is strongly argued for by the urban geographer and Professor Don Mitchell in his book *The Right to the City: Social Justice and the Fight for Public Space*, in which he claims that it is exactly the spatial dimension of the public that is relevant for political visibility. In his terms, a despatialized concept, such as the public sphere one is unable to grasp the importance of the physical public space for the struggle of rights and social justice.¹⁰ However, in order to clarify the concept of the public space as opposed to the concept of the public sphere, the latter one needs to be presented as well.

The public sphere was most notably theorized by Jürgen Habermas in *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, published in 1962. The idea put forward was that the public sphere is not necessarily a physical space, but rather an imaginary one, where a community is being constructed. He built the concept of the public sphere with the aftermath of the democratic revolutions (French and American) in mind, as well the type of bourgeois society that was conceived in that period. Thus, for Habermas the public sphere “consisted of social spaces where individuals gathered to discuss their common public affairs and to organize against arbitrary and oppressive forms of social and public power.”¹¹ This work became the starting point of an intense debate regarding the public sphere as an important political concept. According to Habermas:

the principles of the public sphere involved an open discussion of all issues of general concern in which discursive argumentation was employed to ascertain general interests and the public good. The public sphere thus presupposed freedoms of speech and assembly, a free press, and the right to freely participate in political debate and decision-making.”¹²

⁹ Katrina L. Johnston, “Public Space and Urban Life: A Spatial Ethnography of a Portland Plaza” (MA Thesis, Portland State University) accessed 12 July, 2016, http://pdxscholar.library.pdx.edu/open_access_etds/624.

¹⁰ Don Mitchell, *The Right to the City: Social Justice and the Fight for Public Space*, 1 edition (New York: The Guilford Press, 2003).

¹¹ Douglas Kellner “Habermas, the Public Sphere, and Democracy: A Critical Intervention,” accessed 10 April 2016, <https://pages.gseis.ucla.edu/faculty/kellner/papers/habermas.htm>.

¹² Lewis Edwin Hahn, *Perspectives on Habermas* (Chicago: Open Court Publishing, 2000), 264.

He put the idea of the bourgeois public space against the more contemporary capitalist society where the community is no longer formed through a deliberative, rational, publicly made consensus, but rather elites with their private interests shape the political order.

The public sphere in a Habermasian articulation was (and still is) broadly discussed and criticized. The starting point of his inquiry was the public debate in the early bourgeois society. At that time, this arena was dominated by one class of people: white, educated and prosperous males, hence other groups of society were excluded from the public sphere. Critics addressed the issue of the invisibility of other existing public spheres in the time, such as women and the working class, usually termed as counterpublics.¹³ Habermas favored the idea of the supremacy of one democratic, rational public sphere, where consensus on public matters is being achieved. The lack of openness of this idea has been identified by Habermas' critics. Philosopher Oliver Marchart argues that the public sphere which Habermas stands for:

remains a partial public sphere among many, a public sphere that is not by a long shot ontologically privileged, nor by a long shot [...] a meta- or super-public sphere. [...] And even if we narrow our concept of the public sphere to political and democratic public spheres, their plurality remains irreducible, constituted around a collection of irreducible political language games and divergent demands.¹⁴

Critics address the question of plurality (or rather the lack of it) as the main issue with the concept of public space represented by one public sphere. The very concept constructed by Habermas shows that the idea of the public sphere is not necessarily one of openness and publicness, but is rather a story of exclusion, be it on the basis of gender, class, race, disability or else. Though he was right to point out the political nature of such a public, he didn't develop the idea on the possibility of multiple public spheres existing simultaneously. Marchart further argues that it is exactly the absence of one public sphere as a precondition for a democratic space. He is writing in the tradition of political theorist Ernesto Laclau who stresses that "a democratic society is, of course, incompatible with the existence of only one public space."¹⁵

A second line of criticism regarding the public sphere is profoundly addressed in the writing by political theorist Chantal Mouffe, working closely with Laclau. Mouffe criticizes the notion that a democratic, political sphere where opinions are contested always involves reaching of consensus. According to her, in democratic societies, consensus is nothing more than the silencing of the

¹³ Mary Ryan, "Gender and Public Access: Women's Politics in Nineteenth Century America," in *Habermas and the Public Sphere* (MIT Press, 1992), 259-288.

¹³ Oskar Negt and Alexander Kluge, *Public Sphere and Experience: Toward an Analysis of the Bourgeois and Proletarian Public Sphere (Theory and History of Literature)*, (University of Minnesota Press, 1993).

¹⁴ Oliver Marchart, "Art, Space and the Public Sphere(s). | Eipcp.net," *European Institute for Progressive Cultural Practices*, accessed 11 July 2016, <http://eipcp.net/transversal/0102/marchart/en>.

¹⁵ David Howarth, *Ernesto Laclau: Post-Marxism, Populism and Critique* (New York: Routledge, 2014).254.

alternatives, by making one solution/opinion/order prevail over the others. Opposed to consensus are conflict, division and instability, which do not ruin the public sphere; on the contrary, they are conditions for its existence. By spatializing, political communities make room for the space of politics. "In other words, it is political intervention itself that actually creates the space for politics (the public sphere) - and not the other way around."¹⁶ By the creation of public space, or better said, by giving it a direction and purpose, the *polis* (the people) become the direct creators of the politics, with their daily choices, opinions, reactions, creations and not just as a voting mass. Hence, the abstract idea of the political gets materialized only in the public space. However, in Mouffe's views, Habermas' model of consensual public sphere, as well as the liberal thought in general (to which tradition Habermas belongs to) is unable to grasp the complexity of the political. As clearly argued by Mouffe, the political is always based on collective identities. Therefore, the social (as in its dictionary form, meaning "to relate to society and live together in an organized way"¹⁷) has to be tied to the political and the public-an idea which is not prominent in the liberal democracy. She believes that, due to neo-liberal democracy, we now exist in a post-political order, where political questions are addressed only according to the liberal political thought, with no other alternative available for the citizens. The issue in such a situation, she argues, is that proper political questions always involve decisions that require making a choice between conflicting alternatives.¹⁸ The dominant tendency in liberal thought, which is characterized by a rationalist and individualist approach, is incapable and unwilling to acknowledge the need for alternatives:

One of the main tenets of this kind of liberalism is the rationalist belief in the availability of a universal consensus based on reason. No wonder, that the political constitutes liberalism's blind spot. Liberal thought is also blind to the political because of its individualism, which makes it unable to understand the formation of collective identities. Yet the political is from the outset concerned with collective forms of identification [...]¹⁹

Instead of a public sphere conceptualized in the liberal tradition, Mouffe advocates for an agonistic approach that rejects rational consensus and, as an alternative, embraces conflicting sides as a more political and inclusive practice. Mouffe believes that passion and not rationalism should be the driving force of the public space. She articulates this concept as agonistic politics in the book *Agonistics: Taking the World Politically*. The leitmotif of the book is the shared public space as a platform for articulation of the rights, needs, problems of different social groups, by attempting to resolve the antagonisms of the shared life with agonistics. In Mouffe's argumentation, the agonistic approach is the needed alternative of the liberal consensus, since behind the seeming consensus there is always a hegemonic power which is constructing it. The agonistic approach, thus, argues for a contestation of the

¹⁶ Marchart, "Art, Space and the Public Sphere(s)".

¹⁷ Cambridge Dictionary Online <http://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/social>.

¹⁸ Chantal Mouffe, *Hegemony, Radical Democracy and the Political*, 1 edition (London ; New York: Routledge, 2013).

¹⁹ Chantal Mouffe, *Agonistics: Thinking The World Politically*, 1 edition (London ; New York: Verso, 2013). 4.

hegemonic order which exists in any given society. Mouffe argues that the aim of the counter-hegemonic intervention is to “re-articulate a given situation in a new configuration.”²⁰ For such a disarticulation to take place, first of all, an examination of the composition is needed, a process in which critique of the power relations is necessary:

Things could always be otherwise and therefore every order is predicated on the exclusion of other possibilities. It is in that sense that it can be called ‘political’ since it is the expression of a particular structure of power relations. What is at a given moment considered as the ‘natural’ order - jointly with the ‘common sense’ which accompanies it - is the result of sedimented hegemonic practices [...] There are always other possibilities that have been repressed and that can be reactivated.²¹

It can be established that there is a crucial difference between the concept of public sphere by Habermas and the public space by Mouffe. On the one hand, there is Habermas’ theory of an abstract space where rational deliberation occurs so that consensus can be achieved, while on the other hand, there is Mouffe’s public space, where a constant passionate conflict is what constitutes the counter-hegemonic democratic struggle. The model of radical and plural democracy that Mouffe stands for is not concerned with finding consensus, “but rather with its conflictual opening. It is about avoiding precisely the occupation of the empty space of power.”²²



The theory of agonism is still influential and widely discussed as an important contemporary political theory of the left. Moreover, it has been adopted by other disciplines as well. Artist Krzysztof Wodiczko deliberates on Mouffe’s thought in his lecture from the lecture series “City as Stage, City as Process” held at the MIT in 2009:

²⁰ Ibid., 81.

²¹ Chantal Mouffe, “Artistic Activism and Agonistic Spaces,” *Art & Research A Journal of Ideas, Contexts and Methods* Volume 1, No. 2. (2007), accessed April 10, 2016, <http://www.artandresearch.org.uk/v1n2/mouffe.html>.

²² Marchart, “Art, Space and the Public Sphere(s)”.

Mouffe convincingly demonstrates that this seemingly 'civilized' consensus is in fact a shallow compromise, usually reached at the expense of various social exclusions, rejections that evacuate all inconvenient (yet burning and painful) problems, issues and voices from public discourse.²³

With his artistic practices, Wodiczko seeks to address the issue of plurality, inclusion, awareness and participation in democracy. For him "everything that is democratic has to have a close link with what is social, political, ethical and artistic."²⁴ The privilege of having the rights which democracy can offer, he claims, comes together with an obligation to actively maintain and improve them. Whenever democracy comes to a point of stability, it also risks its own disappearance.²⁵ What democracy could offer is a legal framework for its citizens, he observes, but there is nothing more dangerous than passive citizens. The limited possibilities for political exposure in the neo-liberal democracy pushed Wodiczko into working with the public space as his artistic medium. He makes the city the main platform for his engagement, and participatory art his central tool: ²⁶

The city is both the stage and the stake of democracy. Paraphrasing Jacques Derrida, it is possible to say that "the city does not exist". Like democracy the city is a phantom, "a thing to come" (*a venire*), a "thing to become". And this is where our ethical and political responsibility comes in as a continuous, constantly repeated effort (*encore un effort*) and work on the city.²⁷

Accordingly, in such understanding, the city becomes a platform where citizens are able to create and articulate their specific identities, but even more importantly, to de-articulate/re-articulate the norms of society. The city space can give the opportunity to individuals and groups to become visible, for issues to move from private to public, for silence to become noise. Essentially, that is the constant struggle for emancipation, be it political, cultural, social, sexual, etc. It is throughout this struggle that people become visible political subjects.

b. Tents and Sleeping Bags as Political "Weapons"

The relation between the city and political engagement became a much discussed topic, with the theories of the public space taking over the theories of public sphere. This is due to the fact, that with the infiltration of the counterpublics, the public sphere has become more inclusive nowadays. However, on the other hand, "public space has been pushed in the opposite direction: it has been subjected to increasing control and surveillance."²⁸ A great part of public space researchers agree that urban public space is facing a crisis caused by the increasing privatization and commodification of space, a growing

²³ Krzysztof Wodiczko, "The City, Democracy, and Artistic Practice", Signum Foundation, Poznań Academy of Fine Arts, Poznań Academy of Fine Arts, 12 September 2007.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid., 2.

²⁸ Zhelnina, "'Hanging Out,' Creativity, and the Right to the City".

fear of alien others and so forth. As a side effect, the “right to the city” idea became a leading motif against the restriction of the use of public space. “The right to the city is the demand of social justice through public space use. It has gained considerable resonance on the left, not just in academic circles, [...] but in broader social movements”²⁹, explains professor of urban planning Peter Marcuse. The term was especially popularized in 2008 with the publication of the essay *The Right to the City* by anthropology and geography professor David Harvey. In this essay Harvey defines the right to the city as:

far more than a right of individual access to the resources that the city embodies: it is a right to change ourselves by changing the city more after our heart’s desire. It is, moreover, a collective rather than an individual right since changing the city inevitably depends upon the exercise of a collective power over the processes of urbanization.³⁰

The right to the city is about giving the citizen their space to influence and change the city, not simply inhabit it. From this perspective, public space is *the* ground for the representation of conflicts and struggles³¹ that Mouffe argues for. Harvey emphasizes the role of urban public space as the ultimate means of political communication: “It shows us that the collective power of bodies in public space is still the most effective instrument of opposition when all other means of access are blocked”³² Hence, the link between the political and spatial dimension of public space can be examined through researching urban mobilization. Urban studies experts starting with David Harvey and Richard Sennett were inspired by the Occupy movements to examine such link between urban space and political participation. The growth of urban grassroots movements in recent years put urban space on the political agenda.³³ The Occupy movement showed the problem of limited possibility for the involvement of citizens in decision-making processes and conceptualized it as a violation of the right to the city. Sennett ,by concentrating on Occupy London and New York, puts an accent on the question of the availability of public space that became a political question due to this occupy “sanctuaries”³⁴, which were “at best, semi-legal.”³⁵He goes on to explain how and why that is relevant:

Tents and sleeping bags were the “weapons” with which the Occupy movements tested the city’s limits on freedom of assembly. When allowed, legitimate protest is usually framed by the idea that protesters will pass through public space, not dwell in it — the march rather than the camp.³⁶

²⁹ Peter Marcuse, “Blog #15 – The Right to the City and Occupy: History and Evolution”, *Peter Marcuse’s Blog*, August 3, 2012, accessed 11 July, 2016, <https://pmarcuse.wordpress.com/2012/08/02/blog-15-the-right-to-the-city-and-occupy-history-and-evolution/>.

³⁰ David Harvey, “The Right to the City,” *New Left Review*, II, no. 53 (2008): 23–40.

³¹ Zhelnina, “Hanging Out,’ Creativity, and the Right to the City”.

³² *Ibid.*

³³ *Ibid.*

³⁴ Richard Sennett, “New Ways of Thinking about Space,” *The Nation*, August 5, 2012, accessed 8 June 2016, <https://www.thenation.com/article/new-ways-thinking-about-space/>.

³⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁶ *Ibid.*

The Occupy movements and similar mobilizations, as well as the writings they have inspired, make us think more deeply about the tie between civic engagement in form of urban social movements and the political connotations and outcomes they bring about.³⁷In *The Right to the City: Social Justice and the Fight for Public Space*, Mitchell accents the importance of the creation of spaces.³⁸ In his view, public space is not a space that is permitted to be used by the state, and publicness is not preordained to public spaces. Rather, it is the actions of citizens which take the space and make it public by the demand for the right to the city. It is in that sense that Peter Marcuse argued that “the best use of public space is illegal, and necessarily so.”³⁹The construction of publicness is often a matter of exposure.

c. “Publicness” in the Post-Socialist Urban Context

The common point of the above discussed literature is that the struggle for the right to the city is conceptualized against the capitalist urbanization of cities, gentrification processes, privatization and commodification of public spaces, mainly for private interest.⁴⁰Even though non-western cities have shown other reasons for urban mobilization,⁴¹ when it comes to public space, meeting points can be found even when comparing different systems. A study on public spaces in St. Petersburg, Russia indicates the same:

Although the reasons for comparing authoritarian and capitalist regimes (the latter are, all things considered, more respectful of freedom of assembly) might not seem obvious, they seem compelling when it comes to public space and the potential for protests: in both cases, occupations of space are declared illegal by the authorities and become the spotlight of political confrontation.⁴²

However, in order to be able to apply the framework to the case study of urban mobilization in the city of Skopje, the local political and social context should be considered. Most research dealing with the issue of public space in post-socialist cities adopts the framework of social transformation investigating the social and political side of the transition from socialism to capitalism.⁴³ Analysis of contemporary urban public mobilization in post-socialist cities can contribute to the debate of public space and what “publicness” means for political action:

The “publicness” of a space is largely measured in terms of its accessibility, inclusiveness, and the freedom of expression possible there. “Publicness” can be threatened by increasing control [...], commercialization, and fear. These terms can be easily applied to socialist, post-socialist, and western capitalist societies. A popular way of discussing public spaces in western capitalist cities is to address the limitations to access resulting from growing social inequalities

³⁷ Zhelnina, “‘Hanging Out,’ Creativity, and the Right to the City”.

³⁸ Mitchell, *The Right to the City*.

³⁹ Zhelnina, “‘Hanging Out,’ Creativity, and the Right to the City”, 232.

⁴⁰ Donatella della Porta and Mario Diani, *The Oxford Handbook of Social Movements* (Oxford University Press, 2015).

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Zhelnina, “‘Hanging Out,’ Creativity, and the Right to the City”231.

⁴³ Ibid.

and attempts by well-off publics to “segregate” themselves from undesirables. Socialist cities were free from these negative effects of capitalism. Public space, however, was controlled and policed by the state to a larger degree than was the case in Europe and the US. Post-socialist societies now face both the new challenges of capitalist inequalities and the legacies of their totalitarian and authoritarian pasts.⁴⁴

Even though apparently there is room for comparing public space and its uses in different systems and regimes, Zhelnina believes that the attempt to compare different cultural and historical realities is not beneficial. Instead, she suggests looking for specific patterns, themes and understandings within a context. Hence, the theoretical framework which focuses on the accessibility of public space, written mainly with the neo-liberal city in mind, might be utilized when researching a post-socialist city. However, the frame of analysis for this thesis is the rise of social urban movements in the context of the political crisis in Macedonia which is intensified after 2010. Therefore, understanding the local context is important in this case, as I intend to examine the urban mobilization as a possible post-effect of the political situation in Macedonia. For that reason, a detailed background on the public space in Skopje and its recent developments will be provided after the methodology section, in order to bring the general theories of public space closer to the local context.

2.2. Public Space and Urban Social Movements

In the previous section some general features of public space were presented. Public space was discussed as:

a space for representation, where heterogeneous social groups openly assert their identity, but, since it is also by definition a space of exclusion, this representation (and the right to it) has to be continuously reasserted.[...]As Mitchell recalls, ‘by claiming space in public, by creating public spaces, social groups themselves become public.’⁴⁵

The connection between urban public space and political engagement was already established. In this section, a reflection on social movement theories will be provided, as another base for understanding the case study of urban mobilization in Skopje. For the purpose of this thesis, a definition by sociologist Kerstin Jacobsson is used, since much of this section is based on her research. In *Urban Grassroots Movements in Central and Eastern Europe* social movements are defined as:

collective action efforts aimed at challenging the present state of affairs by people with common purposes and solidarity in sustained interaction with the elites, authorities and/or opponents, acknowledging that the repertoire of collective action will differ in different context and may range from symbolic resistance to overt protest.⁴⁶

⁴⁴ Ibid., 234.

⁴⁵ “Poposki “Spaces of Democracy: Art, Politics, and Activism in the Post-Socialist City”, 715.

⁴⁶ Jacobsson, “The Development of Urban Grassroots Movements in Central and Eastern Europe,” 7.

Since the focus of the thesis is mobilization happening in the city environment and in direct connection with the city space, a reflection on literature on urban movements is adequate. Urban movements are a merged area for analysis, since they are directly dealing with architecture, environment and neighborhood issues; but through that involvement they indirectly initiate political and social change. As such, they provide an intriguing case study of the spatial and political aspects of public space. Authors have identified the significance of urban mobilization for going beyond their direct objective and influencing the political and social developments of our time. Jacobsson writes on this topic in relation to grassroots mobilization in cities:

Conflicts in the cities are not only a response to processes of urban restructuring and renewal, but also illustrative of larger process of economic, political and social change. Urban grassroots mobilizations arise in response to the new social cleavages and increased polarization as a consequence of neoliberalisation and globalization processes as well as transformation of state power and authority.

The question whether all urban movements can be considered as social movements was brought up by sociologist Manuel Castells already in the 1980's in *City and the Grassroot: A Cross-Cultural Theory of Urban Social Movements*. In this work he is attempting to bring urban movements closer to the idea of social change. For him, space is a fundamental part of society and, as such, cannot be separated from social relationships. Hence, the proposition of his cross-cultural reader is that cities are "a social product of conflicting social interests and values."⁴⁷ In order to bring urban movements and social change closer together, he studies "social urban movements as the heart of a broader theory of urban social change."⁴⁸

The common characteristics of urban movements identified by Castells are:

1. their self-understanding as urban, citizen or related to the city (community)
2. they are locally based and territorially-defined
3. they tend to mobilize around three major goals:
 3. 1. collective consumption
 3. 2. cultural identity and
 3. 3. political-self-management ⁴⁹

Since the case study of this thesis is the city of Skopje, a suitable theory is one considering the post-socialist past of the city. Jacobsson has edited an extensive research on the forms of urban mobilization taking place in post-socialist cities in Europe, becoming one of the pioneers exploring this issue. She argues that there is a gap in the urban studies literature regarding urban movements in this region and

⁴⁷ Manuel Castells, *The City and the Grassroots: A Cross-Cultural Theory of Urban Social Movements*, New edition edition (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), 291.

⁴⁸ Ibid., xvi.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

there is limited attention on urban mobilization in the bigger context of civil society and social movement theory.⁵⁰ Regarding the importance of analyzing the region's mobilizations with respect to the local context she states:

Social movements are shaped by the context in which they appear. The post-socialist context illustrates well the limitations of having a single focus on protest, mass or street, in the study of social movements: with such a focus, researchers and other observers run the risk of missing other relevant forms of protest action and thus of underestimating or misunderstanding the collective action actually taking place on the ground. Moreover, in expecting social movements in the post-socialist countries to follow the same repertoire of action as, for instance, in Western Europe or North America, we risk missing out on important forms of collective action.⁵¹

Researching the post-socialist cities, with a focus on Central, Eastern and South Eastern Europe in this volume, the editor seeks to expand the idea of the forms which urban mobilization might take. The volume likewise explores the factor of the socialist past of the cities (posing the question of the relevance of the legacy as a defining factor) for the development of urban social movements today. An important argument in the book is built against the assumption of the weak civil society (or the lack of it) in post-socialist space. Other researchers also pointed towards a "tension between [...] claims about the weakness of civil society, and available empirical evidence that suggests significant diversity in the nature, development and robustness of civil societies across the region."⁵²In a research conducted by Harvard Professor Grzegorz Ekiert and researcher Roberto Foa, it is noted that the democratization and mobilization of civil society in post-socialist Europe took two parallel developments. The first development was:

massive social mobilization and rapid emergence of a wide spectrum of new organizations and movements (mostly NGOs, foundations, charities, religious and ethnic minority organizations[...]). [...]Second, the majority of former communist controlled organizations experienced a complex and, by and large, successful process of reform and adaptation to new democratic conditions.⁵³

The study suggests a multidimensional view on civil engagement and shows the directions in which civil society was developing after 1989. However, though common characteristics in the development of civil societies are identified in the research, it is also stressed that the conclusions cannot be generalized. The most relevant splits according to the study are "between countries that experienced gradual consolidation of democratic institutions and practices, and countries that experienced retrenchment of liberties and freedoms and restoration of authoritarian systems."⁵⁴The authors

⁵⁰ Jacobsson, "The Development of Urban Grassroots Movements in Central and Eastern Europe".

⁵¹ Ibid.,7.

⁵² Grzegorz Ekiert and Roberto Foa, "Civil Society Weakness in Post-Communist Europe: A Preliminary Assessment," (Carlo Alberto Notebooks. No. 198, January 2011). 9

⁵³ Ibid.,15.

⁵⁴ Ibid.,18.

especially stress the different political development in the counties concerned; since it directly influences the way the citizens are able to engage. The rights of assembly, freedom of expression, the conditions and availability of public space are mentioned as most relevant factors which determine how citizens might organize.⁵⁵

Jacobsson follows up this argument and puts a greater attention on the development of small scale, grass-root, local activism which is usually domestically funded or not funded at all. She adds urban grass-root movements to the picture started by Ekiert and Foa which focuses on state-controlled associational life and the Western-sponsored NGO-ised civil society. Thus far, the research on civil society and social movements of Central and Eastern Europe has mostly focused on mobilization of the NGO-type, characteristic for the first decades of democratic transition. Jacobsson argues that little attention was given to urban grass-root activism since it is a rather new development.⁵⁶ These types of mobilizations, which are related to daily issues or to sub-cultures⁵⁷, are the main focus of Jacobsson’s study, which grounds her research in theory developed by sociologist Ondřej Císařs who studies civic engagement in post-communist settings. The typology presented below was used to create the profile of the urban social movements in the case study of Skopje, following the example of Jacobsson which identifies the movements in her research as civic, self-organized activism. Císařs’s analysis of political engagement in the region suggests five types of activist mode, made according to their transactional and mobilization capacity, presented in Table 1.⁵⁸

Table 1: Typology of activism

		mobilization capacity	
		high	low
transactional capacity	high	participatory activism	transactional activism
	low	episodic mass mobilization	radical activism; civic self-organization

The definitions of five modes of political activism are as follows:

1. Participatory activism
 - based on membership organizations;
 - relatively good access to the political system and able to cooperate with others

⁵⁵ Ibid.
⁵⁶ Jacobsson, "The Development of Urban Grassroots Movements in Central and Eastern Europe."
⁵⁷ Ibid.
⁵⁸ Ondřej Císařs, "A Typology of Extra-Parliamentary Political Activism in Post-Communist Settings: The Case of the Czech Republic," in *Beyond NGO-ization: The Development of Social Movements in Central and Eastern Europe*, ed, Kerstin Jacobsson and Steven Saxonberg (New York: Routledge, 2016) 142.

- public self -presentation based on few events, many participants.⁵⁹

2. Transactional activism

-based on small advocacy organizations;

- public communication depends on the political system and the issue they are tackling;

- public self-presentation based on many events, few participants.⁶⁰

3. Radical activism

- based on loose organization and individuals, not members of any particular group;

- the political system is completely closed to their demands and their networking is narrow

-public self -presentation based on few participants, militant strategies.⁶¹

4. Civic self-organization

-based on „individual“ organizational effort;

-usually not sponsored by formal/informal organizations or group;

- their access to the political system varies, similarly as transactional activists;

-public self-presentation based on many events, no organizations, and few participants.⁶²

5. Episodic mass mobilization

-consists of short-term events based on public displays of high numbers of participants;

-originally neither sponsored by a formal organization or professional activist;

-public self-presentation based on many participants, no organizations, and very few events.⁶³

Císařs uses this theoretical framework for a case study of activism modes in the Czech Republic, Bulgaria and Slovakia. His findings indicate that civic self-organization is the most frequent kind of civic activism in his case studies⁶⁴. The research based on such a framework supports the argument on the relevance of grassroots activism which triggered Jacobsson to place more attention on such mobilizations.

Urban movements could give a fresh input in social movement theory, since they display unique features and do not fit perfectly into the division of old (social question based) and new (identity-based) social movements.⁶⁵ Rather, they combine themes and methods from both old and new social movements, for instance combining cultural events with social issues. The rise of such mobilization in

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Jacobsson, "The Development of Urban Grassroots Movements in Central and Eastern Europe".

⁶⁵ Ibid.

post-socialist cities can be seen as an effect of the radical socio-economic and political transformation that turned the societies from socialist to hyper-capitalist⁶⁶. Some authors argue that labeling these cities as post-socialist decades after the transformation is a way of 'othering' them. However, Jacobsson believes that certain features are shared amongst these communities due to the similar transitioning process. The combination of the socialist legacy and the fast post-socialist transformations make these cities:

have the urban vitality of the Western European inner city neighborhoods; the degree of privatization of urban resources typical of North American cities[...]; an erode level of public service provision characteristic of Third World countries; and the booming economy of the East Asian cities from the 1970s and 1980s.⁶⁷

The complexity of the "everything at once"⁶⁸ type of transformation is evident in the urban environment in the cities, giving birth to specific type of urban movements which tackle most of the issues that the transformation brought about. The grass-root activism is mainly dealing with environmental issues, housing movements, neighborhood mobilizations against the reduction of common space and new constriction, preservation of cultural heritage, artist and architect-led activism. The actions tend to be peaceful with pacifistic spirit, in the form of Do-It-Yourself (DIY) activism, culture jamming, carnival forms of protest and using non-offensive discourse⁶⁹. The actions are usually promoting the stance of 'anti-political politics'⁷⁰, which means "perusing political ends by non-political means"⁷¹. This approach to political activism, as argued by Jacobsson, has its roots in the disengagement and dissatisfaction with the work of the public institutions, as well the experience with corrupt and repressive authorities.⁷² The wave of urban mobilizations could be seen as a local expression of the wider global movement against the neo-liberal city, such as World Social Forum and Occupy. Yet, both a rejection of the state-socialist past and the neoliberal city symbolism are evident in most of the mobilizations taking place in the studied region. As a consequence, the inhabitants, as put by Jacobsson "negotiate the present in relation to the past as well as the future."⁷³ In distancing themselves from the socialist past as well as from the market economy, the urban movements are trying to negotiate an alternative identity somewhere in between, usually connected to some alternative values of the city, the local surrounding and/or neighborhood. This type of glocalism in the region is also framed in the division urban-rural –a

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Kiril Stanilov, *The Post-Socialist City: Urban Form and Space Transformations in Central and Eastern Europe after Socialism* (The Netherlands: Springer Science & Business Media, 2007).12

⁶⁸ Jacobsson, "The development of Urban Grassroots Movements in Central and Eastern Europe".

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Ibid., 14

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Ibid., 17

typical distinction, especially for ex-Yugoslavian citizens⁷⁴. This divide at times can be seen as a privilege and superiority of the urban citizen in relation to the rural dweller, making room for class distinctions and inability for cross-class coalitions. This division is explained by Jacobsson in terms of cosmopolitanism opposed to nationalism:

The *urban habitus* is seen as synonymous with humanistic and cosmopolitan ideals in contrast to the 'peasant mentality' of patriotism and national pride. Nationalism—whether contested, embraced or present as a 'structuring absence'—is a marked feature of urban activism in the region.⁷⁵

However, collaborations are evident across the civil society groups in the urban setting, which need each other's help mostly due to the lack of resources. Most of these collaborations do not formalize with organizational structure, yet informal cooperation is not a rare occurrence. Such development is an important one, argues Jacobsson, in order to overcome divisions in the public space, characteristic for post-socialist space.⁷⁶ This type of positive connotation of the urban activism, most significantly serves as a platform for claiming rights without being associated with the sphere of institutional politics. According to culture geographer Mariucz Czepczynski, this is a reconstruction of the civic significance of urban space, one of the most important tasks in front of post-socialist societies.⁷⁷ The newly attached meaning to the urban citizen is associated to active participation in the public discourse.

Since it is difficult to develop criteria for assessment the different accomplishments of urban movements, their emancipatory potential and political influence is something to keep in mind. The importance of urban activism is the potential to influence the citizens into becoming more actively involved in public matters, opening potential horizons for future action space.⁷⁸ To be able to understand the achievements of the urban movements a deeper way of looking at their actions is needed. Rather than focusing on their immediate results (or the lack of them), we need to grasp their capacity of empowerment, encouragement and mobilization.

2.3. Public Space and Artistic Interventions

Art as "an opportunity for true perception and criticism of the times we live in"⁷⁹and beyond

The need for public spaces to be open, accessible and pluralistic is not a debate which is only relevant for political science, sociology and urban studies. In recent years, this issue became prominent in the so-called "creative class", as a pressing global topic of our time.⁸⁰ Activism and art have united

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Ibid., 18

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Mariusz Czepczynski, *Cultural Landscapes of Post-Socialist Cities: Representation of Powers and Needs* (Routledge, 2016).

⁷⁸ Jacobsson, "The Development of Urban Grassroots Movements in Central and Eastern Europe".

⁷⁹ Hugo Ball, *Flight Out of Time: A Dada Diary* (University of California Press, 1996). 58

⁸⁰ Zhelnina, "Hanging Out," Creativity, and the Right to the City"

(sometimes referred to as activism) in order to make a civic contribution towards the transformation of the public space. This fuse between art and civic action oftentimes brings about a debate regarding the role of art in society and the ability of art to be a medium for political engagement. Art activism is often criticized from both the perspective of the traditional art world as not possessing artistic quality, as well as traditional activist perspective as diverting attention away from the political issue with the use of art.⁸¹ Philosopher and art critic Boris Groys, believes that it is easy to dismiss the artistic quality critique, due to the legacy of the avant-garde movements of the 20th century, when all “criteria of quality and taste were abolished.”⁸² The criticism from an activist perspective calls for more attention, he argues. Nonetheless, before focusing on the evaluation of activism from an activist perspective, a brief account of the history of avant-garde art will be presented, so as to recognize the roots of the transformed understanding of art today.

The artistic avant-garde groups of the 20th century went beyond the sensate experience of traditional art form in that period, challenging the existing role of art to a more proactive one. They believed in the responsibility of art to shape reality, instead of only reflecting it. With the core phrase that “the new artist protests, he no longer paints”⁸³, written in 1918 by Dadaist Tristan Tzara, a new role for art was introduced, with an aim of moving the culture of spectatorship towards one of participation. What is left as a relevant legacy from the avant-garde is the combination of social and artistic movements, for the first time “hybridizing the roles of activist and artist.”⁸⁴ Chantal Mouffe is one of the advocates for such a positioning of art today, and stresses the role that art has in the counter-hegemonic struggle:

the modernist idea of the avant-garde has to be abandoned, but that does not mean that any form of critique has become impossible[...]As Brian Holmes puts it: ‘Art can offer a chance for society to collectively reflect on the imaginary figures it depends upon for its very consistency, its self-understanding.’⁸⁵

Even though the authentic avant-garde of the 20th century ceased to exist, what is relevant as a legacy today is the link between the concepts of responsibility, criticism, solidarity in relation to the concept of art. In that sense, the legacy of the avant-garde, as argued by Levine, holds a special place in today’s democratic society as a cultural institution that is defined by its resistance.⁸⁶

It is important to be noted that the tendency of activist art today is not merely to be critical of the times and bring about awareness of political issues. Going further than that goal, art activism aims

⁸¹ Boris Groys, “On Art Activism”, *E-Flux*, accessed April 8, 2016, <http://www.e-flux.com/journal/on-art-activism/>.

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ Tristan Tzara, “Dada Manifesto” (1918) accessed 11 March 2016, <http://www.391.org/manifestos/1918-dada-manifesto-tristan-tzara.html#.VHiWlzHF9Jc>.

⁸⁴ Gavin Grindon, “Autonomy, Activism, and Social Participation in the Radical Avant-Garde”, *Oxford Art Journal* 34 ,(2011).95

⁸⁵ Mouffe, “Artistic Activism and Agonistic Spaces.”

⁸⁶ Caroline Levine, *Provoking Democracy: Why We Need the Arts* (John Wiley & Sons, 2008).

at stimulating mobilization and participation amongst citizens. Different tools and actions are used for this purpose such as: place-making, occupation and protest, community murals, neighborhoods initiatives, debates and deliberations. Socially engaged artist Pablo Helguera set some basic grounds for understanding activist art in his book *Education for Socially Engaged Art* by drawing connecting lines between art that is socially engaged and deliberative democracy. The argument for such an approach to art is that art cannot avoid taking a position in current political and social affairs.⁸⁷ Similarly, art critic Boris Groys distinguishes critical art which only represents an issue from activist art which aims at creating a change in society:

art activists react to the increasing collapse of the modern social state and try to replace the social state and the NGOs that for different reasons cannot or will not fulfill their role.⁸⁸

These forms of art are becoming recognized by the institutionalized art world, most officially and publicly by the 7th Berlin Biennale, when political projects were exhibited as art. The Occupy Movements, for instance, were practicing their forms of protest at the Biennale. This road towards merging left political movements with the art world perhaps is a logical development. Already during “Occupy Wall Street” it has been argued that art assisted the success of Occupy, “by interrupting established perceptions and experiences of the city, politics and democracy itself”⁸⁹. The concept of displaying the Occupy Movements at the Biennale was elaborated in a statement by main curator and artist, Artur Żmijewski who articulates the goal of the Biennale as: “to open access to performative and effective politics that would equip [us] ordinary citizens with the tools of action and change. Art is one of these tools.”⁹⁰ The approach of the Biennale, that is, declaring real political action as a form of art, became a hot topic for debate, in terms of the influence that art could have on the political effectiveness of the movements. This dilemma introduces the second point of criticism of activist art, concerning the element of aestheticization of political movements. By re-performing the Occupy Camp in an established art institution, it becomes possible to treat it as an art piece that can be viewed, evaluated, and appreciated (or not) for its aesthetic quality, instead for its political goals and effectiveness.⁹¹

However, many theorists actually praise the aesthetics of art as the chief characteristic that makes a possible revolutionary actor in societies. The Frankfurt School of critical theory has been working on this topic extensively. In the *“Aesthetic dimension”*, Herbert Marcuse states that “the truth of

⁸⁷ Pablo Helguera, *Education for Socially Engaged Art: A Materials and Techniques Handbook* (New York: Jorge Pinto Books Inc., 2011).

⁸⁸ Groys, “On Art Activism”.

⁸⁹ Sebastian Loewe, “When Protest Becomes Art: The Contradictory Transformations of the Occupy Movement at Documenta 13 and Berlin Biennale 7” *Field Journal*, accessed April 8, 2016, <http://field-journal.com/issue-1/loewe>.

⁹⁰ Artur Żmijewski, “7th Berlin Biennale for Contemporary Politics by - Berlin Biennale,” accessed April 8, 2016, <http://blog.berlinbiennale.de/en/allgemein-en/7th-berlin-biennale-for-contemporary-politics-by-artur-zmijewski-27718>.

⁹¹ Sebastian Loewe, “When Protest Becomes Art.”

art lies in its power to break the monopoly of established reality to define what is real.⁹²Therefore, the combination of what art says and how it says it, together, has become the base for its progressive character. In the same work he goes further in analyzing the different aspects that make art revolutionary, explicitly specifying the virtue of aesthetic transformation as the key for freedom and rebellion. In this way, he argues, art can break through the mystified social reality and open the horizon of change (liberation).⁹³ Moreover, he accents the role and potential of art in becoming a platform for community building, since due to the aesthetic language, art is able to bring issues to the public in a private, even intimate manner and in such a way create links between members of society. Marcuse advocates for a shift from the individual to the collective and believes art has a role in promoting that: “Solidarity and community do not mean absorption of the individual. They rather originate in autonomous individual decision; they unite freely associated individuals, not masses.”⁹⁴

More recently, the problem of aestheticization of activism has been similarly analyzed by Boris Groys in his article “On Art Activism.”⁹⁵He states that it is exactly the aesthetic element (best seen and learned by art), which gives us the tools and possibility to move forward and re-imagine beyond the present state of affair. “In an art context”, he explains, “to aestheticize the things of the present means to discover their dysfunctional, absurd, unworkable character.”⁹⁶ With such a deconstruction of the term Groys embraces aestheticization not just as a possible addition to political action, but as a *sine qua non* for it. He concludes his article by briefly touching the issue of the end of history, which he claims is often addressed to the total aestheticization of our time. However, he sees such connections as illusionary:

One can aestheticize the world—and at the same time act within it. In fact, total aestheticization does not block political action; it enhances it. Total aestheticization means that we see the current status quo as already dead, already abolished. And it means further that every action that is directed towards the stabilization of the status quo will ultimately show itself as ineffective—and every action that is directed towards the destruction of the status quo will ultimately succeed. Thus, total aestheticization not only does not preclude political action; it creates an ultimate horizon for successful political action, if this action has a revolutionary perspective.⁹⁷

The potential of artistic tools for creating visibility in public spaces in a direct way⁹⁸ has been identified by urban activists which incorporate knowledge and methods from the field of the contemporary art in every day projects and actions, which are usually bottom-up, grassroots types of mobilizations. This phenomenon can be noticed as a global tendency. Yet, it is relevant to be studied in the specific

⁹² Herbert Marcuse, *The Aesthetic Dimension: Toward A Critique of Marxist Aesthetics* (Boston, Mass.: Beacon Press, 1979).⁹⁴

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁵Groys “On Art Activism”

⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁹⁷ Groys, “On Art Activism.”

⁹⁸ Ibid. Zhelnina, “‘Hanging Out,’ Creativity, and the Right to the City”.

contexts, as it usually derives from the local culture, as well as political and social setting. Artists Zoran Popovski writes on the tendencies of art activism in the post-socialist context to reclaim public space. Creative actions are created as opposed to the privatization policies:

in an attempt to transform everyday urban experience by rewriting the body of the city with messages other than those emanating from the centers of power, capital, and privilege. The approach taken by all these art projects is the one Michel de Certeau calls a “tactic”. Without a place of its own, a tactic operates in isolated actions, takes advantage of opportunities and depends on them, reacting immediately.⁹⁹

However, though common for most post-socialist cities in Europe, Popovski argues that despite the fact that activism in Macedonia is noticeably growing, activism, on the other hand, is a less prevalent tool for engagement:

In Macedonia, contrary to the increasing level of activism that has been noticeable recently, activism – an activist action directed to creating change through the medium and resources of art – has been less prevalent.¹⁰⁰

Nevertheless, in the period that followed the publication of the above quoted article in 2011, activism became more widespread as a tool for activism. Parallel to the intensifying of the political crisis in Macedonia, many initiatives, groups, activists, artists and individuals started to express their political views by alternative uses of the public space, thus reshaping and reinventing its values and meanings. This thesis will try to complement the research done by Popovski by arguing that after 2010, art activism was indeed noticeably growing as an urban phenomenon.

The three themes presented in this chapter were:

1. Aspects of public space;
2. Urban social movements;
3. Artistic activism.

As presented, they all have a specific purpose in relation to the research, but also jointly form a theoretical framework to answer the main problem of the thesis, i.e. the rise of urban social movements in the city of Skopje in the period after 2010 and their influence on the public space with the use of creative methods. More specifically, the first theme is set to frame the presentation of the public space in the city of Skopje as a background for case study. The second theme helps in setting criteria for choosing the movements included in this study and recommends the themes through which the urban social movements in a post-socialist context might be explored. Lastly, the theme on artistic activism offers the needed background to understand the position of art in relation to activism, and illustrates the

⁹⁹ Popovski, “Spaces of Democracy: Art, Politics, and Activism in the Post-Socialist City”, 717.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 718.

advantages and draw-backs of such a relation. The methodology used for constructing and researching the case study will be presented in the following chapter.

Chapter 3: Methodology

The interest of this thesis is exploring the recent wave of urban mobilization in the city of Skopje, occurring in the period between 2010 and 2016. The focus is on grassroots type of activism, carried out in the public space with the use of artistic methods. The aspects explored in the thesis are:

- the public space as a political and spatial dimension and the aesthetic aspect of interventions in the public space (from a theoretical perspective);
- urban movements as agents for social change in the public space (from a theoretical perspective);
- the public space in Skopje explored through the prism of the theoretical framework;
- the rise of urban, creative mobilization in the city of Skopje and the different methods they employ, analyzed through the theoretical framework.

The time period selected as a frame for the research is 2010 to 2016, with 2016 being the year when interviews and field research was conducted. The time frame period for the research is not very strict. Some of the analyzed actions commenced slightly before the suggested year, and most of them will probably continue happening after 2016. However, the period suggested aims at indicating that, as the political crisis in Macedonia was deepening, the activism in Skopje became more prominent, visible and creative. This thesis, by focusing on the period after 2010 aims at exploring the development and growth of the use of art(taken in a very broad understanding) as a tool in activism, by analyzing several actions that happened in Skopje in the mentioned time period.

In the following sections I will present the general methodological approach that I used in addressing the problems of this thesis, the research design, specific methods of data collection and analysis as well as potential limitations of the used methodology.

3.1. The Case Study Method

Before going into detail regarding the detailed method design and implementation, I would like to mention the selection process of the case study. My personal interest was perusing the relations between social change and creative engagement by citizens in that process. This interest came from my knowledge both in political science and cultural studies, thus I aimed at combining these two spheres by a contemporary, empirical research. I was particularly drawn to researching these issues in a post-socialist context as a vibrant area for studying social change in relation to recent waves of grassroots activism. After doing some initial research on the topic of creative activism in post-socialist

cities in Europe, I came to realize that it is rather difficult to find academic research covering these issues in the case of Macedonia. Being acquainted with the civil society culture in the city of Skopje where in the same time intrigued by the growing number of movements and initiatives operating in the public space, I decided that a research in the city of Skopje can address the research gap and introduce the activism of Skopje in the broader framework of urban movements and public space.

The methodology selected to address the research questions is qualitative research, using case study as a research method. Researcher Dawson Hancock defines case studies as a type of qualitative research which present:

intensive analyses and descriptions of a single unit or system bounded by space and time. Topics often examined in case studies include individuals, events, or groups. Through case studies, researchers hope to gain in-depth understanding of situations and meaning for those involved.¹⁰¹

Basic case study literature states that case study has, as a starting point, the desire for a close and/or otherwise in-depth understanding of the case (or cases) analyzed in their natural context:

The in-depth focus on the case(s), as well as the desire to cover a broader range of contextual and other complex conditions, produce a wide range of topics to be covered by any given case study. In this sense, case study research goes beyond the study of isolated variables. As a by-product, and as a final feature in appreciating case study research, the relevant case study data are likely to come from multiple and not singular sources of evidence.¹⁰²

Case studies are usually appropriate to be used when dealing with explanatory questions such as “How or why did something happen?” In order to grasp the studied phenomenon, case study research usually approached the problem by triangulation methodology – different sources of information and different kinds of information are relevant in order to understand the hows and whys in the given case. Furthermore, “by emphasizing the study of a phenomenon within its real-world context, the case study method favors the collection of data in natural settings.”¹⁰³ Accordingly, the combination of the need for a qualitative research method and the complexity of the issue that needs exploration by the use of multiple channels, as well as its determination from the local context, served as an argument for case study research. Additionally, there has not been much research conducted on this topic in this specific local context which makes this research automatically more exploratory than confirmatory, pointing again to case study research as:

it normally seeks to identify themes or categories of behavior and events rather than prove relationships or test hypotheses. Because it involves collecting and analyzing information from multiple sources, such as interviews, observations, and existing documents, case study

¹⁰¹ Dawson R. Hancock and Bob Algozzine, *Doing Case Study Research A Practical Guide for Beginning Researchers* (Teachers College Columbia University New York and London, 2006), 9

¹⁰² Robert K. Yin, *Applications of Case Study Research*, 3 edition (Thousand Oaks, Calif: Sage Publications, Inc, 2011).4

¹⁰³ Ibid.,5

research sometimes requires the researcher to spend more time in the environment being investigated than is the case with other types of research.¹⁰⁴

3.2. Sampling the Units of Analysis

The thesis is based on a single case study. In order “to illuminate the case”¹⁰⁵ from more than one aspect, the study incorporates multiple units of analysis.¹⁰⁶The units of analysis in this case are selected urban mobilizations which provide data for better understanding of the case study and the context. Thus, the research design is based on a single case study with multiple embedded units. The prevailing criterion for sampling the units of analysis was to find units of analysis that match the theoretical framework. That is why the characteristics of urban movements by Manuel Castells which were explained in the theoretical section on urban mobilization were taken into account.¹⁰⁷ From there, I constructed a couple of extra criteria in order to choose units that would correspond to the first and third theme of the theory as well: the section on the theories of public space and the section on art activism in relation to public space. Four extra criteria were taken into consideration:

1. The unit has to be an initiative, group, individual, activist or artist (representative of certain urban mobilization), dealing with a social/political issue
2. The unit has to use creative/artistic methods as a tool for activism
3. The unit has to intervene in the public space of the city with the actions
4. The unit has to be active in the time frame selected, 2010 to 2016 (including 2016)

Due to the time and resource limitations, as well the character of the study (qualitative), I further narrowed my scope with an aim to focus on less units of analysis, but more in-depth. The final choice was made by taking into consideration the channels through which the units are conveying their activism. What I mean by that, is that in order to analyze and present different forms of urban mobilization and still be able to analyze it qualitatively, I focused on mobilizations which employ(ed) diverse tools of actions and approach activism from different angles. Yet, the selected units also belong to one general network of urban activists, which represent one wide-ranging, informal urban movement in Skopje, working as an opposition to the current political settings. Collaborations, interactions, group

¹⁰⁴ Hancock and Algozzine, *Doing Case Study Research A Practical Guide for Beginning Researchers*.16

¹⁰⁵ Pamela Baxter and Susan Jack, “Qualitative Case Study Methodology: Study Design and Implementation for Novice Researchers,” *The Qualitative Report*, 13(4), (2008) : 544-559 , accessed April 30, 2016, <http://nsuworks.nova.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1573&context=tqr.550>

¹⁰⁶ Robert K. Yin, *Applications of Case Study Research*.

¹⁰⁷ 1. their self-understanding as urban, citizen or related to the city (community)
2. they are locally based and territorially-defined
3. they tend to mobilize around three major goals:
3. 1. collective consumption
3. 2. cultural identity and
3. 3. political-self-management

actions, friendships are to be noticed as a connecting trait for all the movements analyzed. Due to such approach, the case of the rise of creative, urban activism in Skopje can be analyzed as a connecting theme for all the units of analysis. However, what the embedded units of analysis can offer individually is a deeper understanding of the forms that mobilizations take and the kind of influence and effect they seek to achieve or believe have already achieved. The need for a small sample of analysis to be studied in-depth, as well as the narrow criteria for sampling, resulted in the selections of ten initiatives that fit the profile. The snowball technique, where one contact leads to another, was used for the majority of them. In some cases, such as the anonymous artistic interventions which occurred in Skopje in 2015 and the authorship is publicly unknown, the word-of-mouth technique was used to reach the artistic group behind the interventions. The movements were contacted via their Facebook pages or other contacts I could find such as e-mails and telephone numbers. Contact was established with all of them in order to acquire some first-hand information regarding their current status and availability for taking part of a study. Seven movements were willing to take active part in the research, and one movement was added later. The reasons for adding it will be given later on in this chapter. The approach to researching the problem was conducting interviews with the creators and/or organizers or relevant (active members) of the movements to be analyzed. In this way, a deep and thorough understanding of the movements was obtained. Key actors in the movements were identified and contacted. As experienced activists they were able to speak not regarding one movement alone, but also discuss the issues of public space (theoretically and practically), activism and art, social change, etc. The angle of the interviews was expert interviews, since the interviewees are professionals in the field I am studying. However, as in most case study research, a combination of sources gives better result. As stated by Hancock and Algozzine:

[c]ase study research is richly descriptive, because it is grounded in deep and varied sources of information. It employs quotes of key participants, anecdotes, prose composed from interviews [...]¹⁰⁸

Consequently, besides interviews, the web pages and/or Facebook pages of the initiatives were looked at for general information regarding their actions, history, goals, etc. Lastly, a limited amount of field work observation was conducted. The movements presented in the thesis are as following:

1. Го Сакам ГТЦ (I love the City Trade Center, GTC) – a citizen's initiative to preserve the authentic, modernist looks of the city mall;
2. Радио Слободно Скопје (Radio Free Skopje) – an open artistic platform aiming at voicing out challenges arising from the ongoing political and economic crisis as well as expressing thoughts and ideas for the future;

¹⁰⁸ Hancock and Algozzine, *Doing Case Study Research A Practical Guide for Beginning Researchers*.16

3. Распеани Скопјани (Singing Skopians) – a politically/socially engaged choir;
4. Интимни мапи на женските градови (Intimate Maps of the Female Cities) – An original project of the feminist collective Tiiiiit!Inc.;
5. Мобилна / Монтажна Галерија (Mobile/Montage Gallery) – an intervention in the public space offering direct communication between the artists and cultural workers with the citizens and audience;
6. Anonymous Urban Artistic Interventions – consequential interventions in the public space of Skopje made by an anonymous group of artists in summer 2015;
7. “Паркобрани” (Park defenders) and “Ние сме Карпош 4” (We are Karposh 4) – informal, neighborhood mobilizations, organized spontaneously, seeking to preserve green areas in Skopje through various methods.
8. “Шарена Револуција” (Colorful Revolution) – the latest anti-government protesting movement in Skopje, demanding justice, rule of law and fair elections. This movement was added to the thesis at a later time. The rationale behind that decision will be explained in the following sub-section.

In case study research of social movements is of great importance to “identify those persons in the research setting who may have the best information with which to address the study’s research questions.”¹⁰⁹ Key activists from the above mentioned initiatives were contacted in order to schedule interviews and get primary data. All initiatives agreed to take part in the study and interviews were scheduled unofficially. The interviews were meant to be the main source of data, as they are commonly used in case study research, their biggest advantage being the access to “rich, personalized information.”¹¹⁰ The interviews in Skopje were scheduled for the week between the 12th and 19th of April 2016, during my stay in Skopje. However, unexpected conditions after my arrival took the steer wheel; hence the planned methodology got a slightly different direction. The backroad for the slight change of methodology will be briefly explained in the following section.

3.3. Unforeseen Influences on the Research

In the following section a brief account to current political events unfolding in Macedonia will be given, as a relevant background for the case study. The reason why I felt it is necessary to explicitly explain the political situation in Macedonia in the Methodology chapter is because I believe it directly influenced the direction of my thesis, especially regarding methodology. The political crisis in Macedonia will be touched upon as a topic and more attention will be put to the recent wave of protests happening as an answer to the crisis.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.,40

¹¹⁰ Ibid.,39

The governing party in Macedonia is the right-conservative party VMRO-DPMNE since 2006. Civil unrest regarding many controversial projects and/or actions led by the government of VMRO-DPMNE (protests against police brutality,¹¹¹ protest against urban interventions by the government,¹¹² student protests¹¹³) started happening already in 2009, and escalated with the student protests and anti-government protests in 2015.¹¹⁴ Shortcomings in the functioning of the public institutions as well as the rule of law and abuses of government power were central points around which the political crisis in Macedonia was centered, increasingly so after 2014 when the biggest opposition party did not recognize the government elections as legitimate. Even though the country has been through a difficult transition since 1991, followed by a hard economic situation, it is only in the last three years that the country is considered to be in political crisis. The boiling point of the political crisis that motivated thousands of people to take the streets in spring of 2015 were wiretapped recorded conversations that were released by the leader of the opposition party in that period. The wiretapes which are available to the broad public, point to "massive wiretapping, widespread corruption and interference in the judiciary and the media by Gruevski¹¹⁵ and his government, amongst other offenses and abuses of power."¹¹⁶ What followed the wiretape incident and the anti-government protests of 2015 was the political involvement of mediators from the international community and, amongst other methods of solving the issue, the creation of a Special Prosecutor's Office in September 2015 for the purpose of investigating the allegations made in the tape recordings. In a situation of deep political crisis; the Prime Minister being resigned and the Parliament dissolved, the independent prosecutor and her team brought hope that, after all, the crisis could be put to an end in an institutional way. The Special Prosecutor's office opened cases against highest state officials, jeopardizing their freedom with the possibility of many years spent in prison for the alleged crimes.

On my arrival date, the 12th of April, the president of Macedonia officially announced his decision to grant amnesty and abolition for all politicians undergoing judicial proceedings by the Special Prosecutor's office. According to his decision, the prosecuted persons shall be pardoned for the crime(s) he or she is convicted of and shall not be sentenced. After the decision of the President to give amnesty to all politicians facing charges, quite expectedly, major civil unrest broke out on the streets of

¹¹¹ Sinisa Jakov Marusic "Macedonians Protest Over 'Fatal Police Beating,'" *Balkan Insight*, 7 June 2011, accessed May 2, 2016, <http://www.balkaninsight.com/en/article/macedonians-protest-after-police-murders-youngster>.

¹¹² "Violence Disrupts Student Protests in Skopje," *Balkan Insight* 30 March 2009, , accessed May 2, 2016, <http://www.balkaninsight.com/en/article/violence-disrupts-student-protests-in-skopje>.

¹¹³ Branimir Stalević "Skopje, You Will Be Joy' – an Account of the Student Protests in Macedonia," *Balkans in Europe Policy Blog*, 17 April 2016, accessed 2 May 2016, <http://www.suedosteuropa.uni-graz.at/biepag/node/133>.

¹¹⁴ Sinisa Jakov Marusic, "Macedonians Stage Mass Protest for PM's Resignation" *Balkan Insight*, 17 May 2015, accessed May 2, 2016, <http://www.balkaninsight.com/en/article/macedonia-braces-for-big-anti-government-protest>.

¹¹⁵ ex-Prime minister of Macedonia Nikola Gruevski

¹¹⁶ Sinisa Jakov Marusic, "Macedonians Stage Mass Protest for PM's Resignation."

Skopje and, soon enough, in other Macedonian cities.¹¹⁷ Though my interviews were more or less scheduled throughout the week I was planning to spend in Skopje, the unexpected decision of the President and the protests which followed brought everybody on the streets. By everyone I mean all the people I was planning to interview, as well as myself. Even though I was seeing my interviewees almost on daily basis during the protests, it became difficult to accomplish all eight interviews in the course of this week. Eventually, I managed to conduct six interviews in Skopje, and one interview online. Those I did not manage to meet in person; I stayed in contact via email or Facebook. That way, they were able to offer me their help online, as well as gave me relevant links for their work.



Finally, the most important new direction that my case study took is the decision I made to include the protests as my last unit of analysis. I made this decision based on few points. First of all, while I was taking the streets with the other citizens, it seemed to me that these massive protests are a sort of culmination of the crisis in Macedonia, at least from a civil society perspective. By the attendance rate and durability of the protests, it could be noted that these were the biggest, most massive protests happening in independent Macedonian history. Moreover, the fact that all of the prospective interviewees were taking part in the protests, it seemed that the protests were a kind of umbrella event where everyone meets under the vail of one bigger cause – bringing down the current regime. In the interviews that I have conducted, the political crisis and the on-going protests were an unavoidable topic, thus the situation pushed me in making a field observation on the spot. Interestingly enough, after couple of protesting days, the protests starting developing a signatory aesthetic expression by using painting in the public space as a form of protest.

¹¹⁷ Aleksandar Dimishkovski, "Protests Erupt in Macedonia as President Halts Wiretapping Inquiry," *The New York Times*, April 12, 2016, accessed 15 June 2016, <http://www.nytimes.com/2016/04/13/world/europe/macedonia-gjorge-ivanov-wiretapping-corruption-investigation.html>.

3.4. Data Collection

a. Interviews

During my stay in Skopje I conducted six interviews (out of seven planned), with members (and/or creators) of the initiatives analyzed in this thesis. Few of the interviewees were able to speak about more than one case, since they are involved in more of the civil actions analyzed. The model used for the interviews was in-depth interviewing for around an hour, usually in a relaxed atmosphere. A guide for the interviews was constructed, based on couple of themes that needed coverage by all interviews. The first section was the public space in Skopje, its development, current situation and possibilities for civil actions. The second theme was focusing on the initiative itself, namely, its history, its cause, its place in the public space, its medium of communication with the public and desired effectiveness. The last point covered was the place of the initiative in the current political happenings. The interviews seemed more like conversations than traditional interviews because a strict structure (in the form of prepared questions) was not imposed. This model is known as semi structured interviews, often encouraged for case study research. Through this approach:

researchers ask predetermined but flexibly worded questions, the answers to which provide tentative answers to the researchers' questions. In addition to posing predetermined questions, researchers using semistructured interviews ask follow-up questions designed to probe more deeply issues of interest to interviewees. In this manner, semistructured interviews invite interviewees to express themselves openly and freely and to define the world from their own perspectives, not solely from the perspective of the researcher.¹¹⁸

The last interview was made online, with a file of questions being sent to the interviewee, from whom I received answers in the same manner. The questions were framed in a similar manner as the ones for the rest of the interviews, but they were more structured and precise, due to the limitations of conducting an interview in such way. However, since the protests in Skopje got more intensive only after I left, this form of interviewing was the only possibility. Hence, the online interview was conducted in June 2016, with a prominent activist from the "Colorful revolution".

The interviews conducted are as following:

1. Danica Cigi Pavlovska – Former President of the Association of Architects of Macedonia, Ministry of Environment and Physical Planning, Local Government Association. She was contacted for an interview as an expert in the field of public space in Skopje, and as the initiator of the initiative "Го Сакам ГТЦ"(I love the City Trade Center);
2. Kristina Lelovac – Actress, Assistant Professor at The Faculty of Dramatic Arts – Skopje, Co-creator of the cultural/ feminist organization Tiiiit! Inc. Contacted for an interview as an active member of

¹¹⁸ Hancock and Algozzine, *Doing Case Study Research A Practical Guide for Beginning Researchers*.40

“Распеани Скопјани”(Singing Skopians) and co/creator of the project Интимни Мапи на Женските Градови (Intime Maps of the Female Cities);

3. Filip Jovanovski –Artist and Activist, Art director of AKTO-festival for contemporary art in Bitola, Co-creator of the artistic initiative COOPERATION and JADRO-association for independent culture. Contacted for an interview as an expert in the topic and active member in many artistic actions. Co-creator of the Mobile/Montage Gallery;

4. Dejan Ivanovski – Architect, Professor at The Faculty of Architecture. Contacted for an interview as one of the initiators of the initiative “Го Сакам ГТЦ”(I love the City Trade Center);

5. Gjorgje Jovanovik – Artist. Contacted for an interview as the creator of the project “Радио Слободно Скопје” (Radio Free Skopje);

6. Visual and socially engaged artist. Contacted for an interview for the anonymous artistic interventions in the public space in Skopje in 2015. Due to required anonymity of the authorship, the pseudonym Andrej will be used in this thesis;

7. Simona Spirovska – Actress and Activist. Contacted for an interview as one of the most recognizable activists in the “Colorful Revolution”.

b. Documents

Generally, documents referred to in case study research are private and public records, personal documents, popular culture documents, researcher-generated documents etc.¹¹⁹A common source for reaching documents nowadays is the Internet, while web-pages, social media pages, e-mail and chat-rooms might be used as data sources. The offline and online sources for documents do not always offer different types of documents since many reports; papers and pages that are found online reflect characteristics of offline documents, with the difference of the way they are accessed¹²⁰. In that way, “online data collection offers an extension of familiar research techniques.”¹²¹ When different types of documents are used separately or in conjunction, they provide a rich source of information with which to augment data collected through interviews and observations. For this research, a limited amount of data was collected through internet sources such as the web-pages of the urban movements or their social media pages, in cases when they do not have an official web page. General information regarding their history, membership, structure, actions and goals was obtained in this way, in order to prepare the interview material, but also to back up the data gathered through interviews.

¹¹⁹ Sharan B. Merriam, *Qualitative Research: A Guide to Design and Implementation* (John Wiley & Sons, 2009).

¹²⁰ Ibid.

¹²¹ Ibid.,157

c. Field Observation

Finally, regarding field observation, the only unit observed was the protest movement in Skopje, referred in this thesis as the Colorful Revolution. Since I was a participant in the protests, I define this fieldwork as participant observation. According to many definitions “participant observation is the process enabling researchers to learn about the activities of the people under study in the natural setting through observing and participating in those activities.”¹²² This qualitative method is used with the objective to learn the perspectives of a group, event, and situation. The data collected is mainly from taking notes and photographs. The participation on the protests from my side lasted for 7 days, during which I was in the city of Skopje. In these days I joined the protest marchers and took photographs of the „coloring method” used by the other participants, which will be presented in this thesis as evidence.



3.6. Data Analysis

The data collected from the research is quite varied, which is common for case study thesis. The data from the interviews was fully transcribed, thus the transcriptions were used as data. The full transcript of the interviews is in Macedonian and only the quoted segments were translated into English by the researcher, with the approval from the interviewees. As for documents (online data precisely speaking),

¹²² Barbara B. Kawulich, “Participant Observation as a Data Collection Method,” *Forum Qualitative Sozialforschung / Forum: Qualitative Social Research* 6, Volume 6, No. 2, Art. 43 (2005), accessed 4 June, 2016, <http://www.qualitative-research.net/index.php/fqs/article/view/466/996>.

they were gathered from official web-pages of the movements for more “dry” information. They were used in order to prepare the interviews and to back up the information received through interviews. Lastly, the field observation in the form of notes were made into a transcript too. Even though the data is diverse, it was analyzed in a similar fashion, mainly with thematic analysis. Thematic analysis is “generally facilitated by categorizing information into themes that represent tentative and then final outcomes for the research. Identifying themes involves a series of steps that end in a collection of parallel findings representing the results of the investigation.”¹²³ The method used for thematic analysis in this thesis was borrowing existing themes from another author; in this case it was Kerstin Jacobsson, editor of the book *Urban Grassroots Movements in Central and Eastern Europe*. The rationale behind using these already established themes was in order to reflect on the activism in Skopje in the broader wave of urban mobilization in cities with similar political and social developments. With such an approach, it can be observed whether there are similar traits in the way urban movements with a similar historical development make sense of their activism and how they are (re)shaping the urban space. It can also be observed what kind of specificities can be attributed to the specific case study of Skopje. Lastly, with such approach to analysis, the case of Skopje can be added to the broader body of knowledge regarding new waves of urban activism in post-socialist cities in Europe. Since this region represents vast diversity, every case can contribute fresh and unique insights. Four themes were identified throughout the research conducted from the authors of the mentioned book, all of them presented in the introductory chapter of *Urban Grassroots Movements in Central and Eastern Europe*. The four themes from that book, that will be used in the 5th chapter of this thesis are: 1. The negotiation of the urban meaning; 2. The ‘Urban’ as a Space for Agency and Basis for Citizenship 3. The role and Challenges of Alliance-Building in Urban Mobilizations; and 4. Urban Movements and Local Governance¹²⁴. The disadvantage of using ready-made themes is the danger of missing out patterns and conclusions which are not provided by the used source. In order to avoid this, I examined the themes critically, by not only identifying similar tendencies, but also opposite ones. Lastly, a separate section will focus on the path from creative action to political resistance, in order to reflect the specific interest of this thesis– that is the creative side of the movements.

To sum up, the research method used for the thesis is a case study research, the artistic activism city of Skopje after 2010 being the case in focus. The case study has few main aims. First of all, the whole case study builds upon the theoretical framework, looking to clarifying the literature and in that sense it is theory-guided.¹²⁵ From another typology that distinguishes case studies as exploratory,

¹²³ Hancock and Algozzine, *Doing Case Study Research A Practical Guide for Beginning Researchers*.62

¹²⁴ Jacobsson, "The Development of Urban Grassroots Movements in Central and Eastern Europe".

¹²⁵ Jack S. Levy, "Case Studies: Types, Designs, and Logics of Inference," *Conflict Management and Peace Science* 25, no. 1 (February 1, 2008): 1–18.

explanatory and descriptive¹²⁶, it could be said that the case study will have elements of a descriptive case study as well, since it will aim at focusing on the natural context in which the intervention and/or phenomenon occurred¹²⁷. Since the theories used in the conceptual framework are rather general and not directly connected to the case, the description and conceptualization of the case study is also an end in itself. Remaining in the same category, it should be mentioned that the case study of Skopje combines elements of an explanatory study as well. According to Dawson Hancock and Bob Algozzine “[the] explanatory case study designs seek to establish cause-and-effect relationships. Their primary purpose is to determine how events occur and which ones may influence particular outcomes.”¹²⁸

3.5. Ethical Issues

The thesis is, at times, dealing with sensitive topics and touches upon controversial matters such as political crisis and protests. Some ethical issues exist, especially with regards to the interviewing process. Due to my involvement and contacts within the civil society, I got an easy access to the needed information, documents and people. The interviewees are people who are resisting the current political setting in Macedonia publicly, therefore were open to speak about it. Since all of the interviewees are recognized activists, they were unrestricted when speaking on political topics and issues. Similarly, they all agreed to be included in this thesis with their full names and surnames. They can be found under their first names throughout the thesis. One artist did request the use of a pseudonym, since he was speaking on the series of anonymous artistic interventions in the public space of Skopje whose authorship needs to remain publicly unknown. He can be found under the pseudonym Andrej. Since the interviews were semi-structured, the interviewees had the liberty to influence the direction of the interview, as well as not answer question they consider inappropriate or controversial in any way. Such situation, however, did not occur. The interviewees were not included in the analysis and interpretation part of research, but online communication with them throughout the research was kept, mainly for double checking information. The interviewees asked for and will be provided with a copy of the thesis after its completion.

3.6. Research Biases and Positioning of the Researcher

Though the choice of the case study has its strong points, as it has been pointed out, there are also important limitations and risks. The major risk comes from different biases that could appear throughout the researching and presenting of this thesis. My involvement in civil actions, protests and different

¹²⁶ Baxter and Jack, “Qualitative Case Study Methodology: Study Design and Implementation for Novice Researchers.”

¹²⁷ Ibid.

¹²⁸ Hancock and Algozzine, *Doing Case Study Research A Practical Guide for Beginning Researchers*.33

forms of activism in the city of Skopje make me not being a neutral observer of the case study, but rather a participant observer. The possibility for biases comes from the fact that I identify with the initiatives analyzed to a certain extent, I have taken an active part in plenty of I have been a passive participant/supported. In order to remain objective and not leading I did not openly speak about my personal views in the interviews. Yet, due to my involvement in the civil society in Skopje and contacts which I maintain with activists, the interviews were open and honest, which I believe is an asset for the research.

The fact that I am fully aware of my standing point, made me careful while doing the research, but it also contributed to the value of this thesis. I managed to preserve scientific objective by framing my position as a semi-insider researcher. The term “insider research” aims at describing projects where the researcher has a certain involvement or connection with the research environment¹²⁹. The reason why I refer to this research as a semi-insider one is because I am not fully involved in the groups and actors I have researched, but to a given extent I am involved in the broader context of the case study. Advantages of being an insider-researcher can be speaking the insider language, understanding the local values, gaining permission to conduct the research, to interview, and to get access to records and documents. The disadvantages of this positioning are the dangers of biases, subjectivity and the duality of identity. However, techniques to avoid these disadvantages do exist. Combining different methods and sources in order to obtain credibility and trustfulness is one of them. Other suggestion is maintaining a reflection diary aside from field notes. In my case, the fact that I was writing the thesis in Krakow and not in Skopje assisted me in keeping a certain distance from the case study. Lastly, working with two supervisors from different backgrounds, who have no direct connection with the case study of my choice, also helped me in minimizing the risk of biases. All of the above mentioned techniques were employed in order to sustain objectivity and credibility from my side.

The main focus of this thesis are the recently developed urban movements in Skopje, which have a grassroots approach and use artistic methods as an activist tool. What is their relation to the rise of similar movements in the region; how are the different movements influencing the public space; what triggers their artistic approach and how they make sense of their actions, are questions which this thesis centers around. To respond to these problems, the chosen methodology is qualitative research. Since urban movements are deeply intersected with the political and social reality, using case study as a research method enables the research to grasp the context in which the movements appeared. The case study approach gives space to examine the broader political background of the problem which is relevant for this research. The case study of the rise of urban movements in Skopje, in the current

¹²⁹ Melanie J. Greene, “On the Inside Looking In: Methodological Insights and Challenges in Conducting Qualitative Insider Research,” *The Qualitative Report* Volume 19, How To Article 15, 1-13 (2014).

political setting is a single case study, but incorporates multiple units of analysis – the analyzed social movements. Seven initiatives are presented as units of analysis for this research, which have been selected in consultation with the theoretical framework on urban social movements. The data collection was made mainly through in-depth interviews, with activists from the respective movements. Furthermore, field observation and documents were referred to in a limited amount. The data was analyzed through thematic analysis in the framework of prevalent themes from the theory on urban movements in post-socialist cities. The rationale behind such a methodological approach was to bring the case of Skopje closer to similar researches done on the topic in post-socialist space but did not include the particular case of Skopje. The methodological approach has some shortcomings, mainly connected to research biases, which may stem from the close involvement of the researcher within the case study environment. The clear conceptualization of the research as a semi-insider one helps in preserving scientific objectivity. In the two following chapters the results of the case study will be presented. First the public space of Skopje will be examined as a contextualization of the case study. Second, the results from the analysis of the urban social movements will be discussed.



Chapter 4: The Case of Skopje – Historical and Urban Development Interrupted

Every city lives. It lives in its own way, but especially its essence, its soul, lives and reflects itself through the public space, because that space is common. There you feel the pulsing, the life of the city. Thus it is logical, normal and natural that they change, they follow the time and become a reflection of certain social movements, phenomena, situations.¹³⁰

¹³⁰ Danica Cigi Pavlovska, interviewed by author, Skopje, 15 April 2016, translated transcript.

¹³⁰hereafter Danica

4.1. A City in Clouds – Brief Historical Overview of the Urban Development of Skopje

Throughout its historical development, Skopje has had the “ability” to attract many unfortunate events which have reshaped its progress, looks, urbanization and identity. The city dates from the times of the Roman Empire when it was known as Skupi. After the first catastrophic earthquake that hit the city in 518 A.D., the natural catastrophes just followed; earthquakes, fires and floods, diminishing the city and continuously acquiring a new start.¹³¹ The fate of Skopje made the city a project which was restarted and reshaped often, depending on the current political climate. Many conquerors passing through Skopje have shaped its identity. Romans, Byzantines, Bulgarians, Serbs, Turks; all left different marks through their involvement with Skopje. Finally, after the First World War, the modern city of Skopje started erecting on the right side of the river Vardar. After the Second World War the city galloped towards modernization and industrialization as part of the bigger unit of Yugoslavia. The free city of Skopje became an administrative, cultural and industrial center, as the capital of the then Socialist Republic of Macedonia. However, the natural inclinations to earthquakes of the city played with its fate again, when in the early morning of 1963 a devastating earthquake of 6.1 moment magnitude hit the city, killing over thousands of people and leaving more than 200.000 homeless.¹³² International forces had come together to help rebuilding the capital of Macedonia at the same location. With more than 80% of the city devastated, an open project for architectural experimentation became reality. The re-construction of the city was to be given to a team that would win the international contest. The famous, futurist architect Kenzo Tange won the call and made the still well-known plan for the future of Skopje. The reconstruction was happening throughout the 60's, thus the modernist architectural style was the main architectural style favored in the project, as a trade mark of the period. The project of Tange became not only a leading architectural project in the post-traumatic city, but also a brand that is still recognized as the promise of a better future for the city of Skopje. The political climate of the time intended to create a socialist capital with an anti-traditional cosmopolitan spirit, in line with the utopian ideas of an ideal, geometrical “city in clouds”, as a symbol for socialistic progress.¹³³ The concept of public space in that time was in line with the socialist political agenda. The urban space was public by default¹³⁴, but like everything else, it actually belonged to the state.

Due to the common changes of the political order, the city of Skopje, especially the city center, became a mixture of the different presences in the area, all of which can be witnessed in the public space of the city center, presenting a multicultural and pluralistic city space. As a result, the cultural

¹³¹ Nikos Chausidisin, *Проектот Скопје 2014 : Скици За Едно Наредно Истражување* (Skopje: Nikos Čausidis, 2013).

¹³² Jakim T. Petrovski, “Damaging Effects of July 26, 1963 Skopje Earthquake” (Institute of Earthquake Engineering and Engineering Seismology, University “Cyril and Methodius”, Skopje, 2004).

¹³³ Nikos Chausidisin *Проектот Скопје 2014 : Скици За Едно Наредно Истражување*.

¹³⁴ Zhelnina, “‘Hanging Out,’ Creativity, and the Right to the City.”

landmarks of the city range from natural sights, to Turkish remains, modernist socialist architecture to new, millennial constructions. All of the mentioned landmarks (as well as others which are not mentioned) together construct the complex identity of the city, as well the identity of the citizens of Skopje.¹³⁵ All of them may not be relevant for everybody living there to the same degree, but indeed all the parts are recognizable and equally contributing to the fluid identity of the city. The identity of one city is constructed by its “visual, narrative and mnemonic identity, or taken all together, the layers and layering of the material and spiritual culture through time, on a given inhabited and enclosed space.”¹³⁶ The fact that the city space has undergone few devastations as well as the reconstructions that came after, made some incoherence in the story of the city’s urban space – an issue felt in the city to this day. The disrespect towards history was identified as an issue by artist Gjorgje Jovanovikj¹³⁷ and architect Danica, both interviewed for this thesis, who similarly traces the discontinuity of the story of the center of Skopje as problematic for the authentic identity of the city and the citizen. Since the most representative part of the city is the city center, its reconstruction from scratch means playing with the national identity as well. In the eyes of one of the interviewees, architect Dejan Ivanovski¹³⁸ “the center of the capital is the center of the country.” According to him, the citizen’s consciousness, the freedom of thought, the cultural and the architectural tendencies – almost everything starts from the center of the city as a model for the other areas. For that reason, the common changes of the public space in the city of Skopje, especially in the central area, indeed have an impact of the broader political setting in the country.

To add to that, the transition from socialism to capitalism introduced massive privatization in a very short period of time. The change of regime altered the understanding of public space, as well as the relation between the city and the citizen. As artist Popovski analyzed in his research based in Skopje; in the transition from socialism (where everything is public), towards capitalism (where private interests prevail), the public completely lost its meaning due to massive privatization which occurred. Thus, similarly to the privatization of state factories, public space was also privatized.¹³⁹ The complexity of the post-socialist city comes from the “time-compressed manner”¹⁴⁰ of its radical transformation. One of the many side-effects of the transformation was a fast and drastic reduction of public space. The post-socialist citizen, Popovski concludes, does not necessarily identify with the public space as a collective “home” for citizens. Hence, the public space in the city of Skopje today is determined by two

¹³⁵ Nebojsa Vilić, *Cunyeajme Go Skopje!(Kn. 2) [Rape Skopje! V 2]* (Skopje: 3П с.из., 2015).

¹³⁶ Ibid.

¹³⁶ The translation of the citations of this book is made by the researcher and hence shouldn't be considered as official translation of the book originally published in Macedonian.

¹³⁷ hereafter Gjorgje.

¹³⁸ hereafter Dejan

¹³⁹ Popovski, “Spaces of Democracy: Art, Politics, and Artivism in the Post-Socialist City.”

¹⁴⁰ Jacobsson, “The Development of Urban Grassroots Movements in Central and Eastern Europe”.

main factors. Politically speaking, the transition from socialism to capitalism changed the public-private relations in the city and introduced some relevant changes to city structure such as decentralization of state budget, privatization, reduction of common space and neo-liberal urbanization among many others.¹⁴¹ However, more specific for the public space in the case of Skopje are the reconstructions of the urban space from scratch. The next section will focus on the shaping and reshaping of the public space in Skopje by the two biggest “top-down” reconstructions.

4.2. Top-Down Shaping of Urban Public Space

The biggest reconstruction of the center of Skopje after 1963 has been happening in the last six years, with the government project commonly known as “Skopje 2014”. The project was announced in the beginning of the year 2010 via video clip that was shared on social media as well as promoted on national television. A core reconstruction of the center of Skopje in baroque and neo-classical style was announced, introducing more than 20 new buildings as well as numerous monuments, sculptures and bridges. The project has been materializing since 2010 and the building has not finished yet. The reactions regarding this project differed; the implementers and supporters have been praising the project’s aspiration of reuniting Macedonians and their history while creating a stronger awareness of national identity.¹⁴² Opponents, on the other hand, have been standing strongly against the way the project has been introduced, its aesthetics and costs. Nevertheless, no space for negotiation was left. The project was announced as a final solution with no space for public, democratic deliberation. Visual artist Nita Cavolli researched the visual content of the project suggesting that:

the objective of this project lies somewhere between uninformed nation branding and overwhelming goals for identity strengthening, through the introduction of an old-new (novel) sense of past and tradition.¹⁴³

In his two books “*Rape Skopje!*” (V 1 and V 2), both motivated by the project, art historian Nebojsa Vilić accents the recreation of the center of the city as an instrument of accomplishing a certain ideology through the public space, by evoking a rereading of the past and manipulating with postmodern argumentation.¹⁴⁴

The two major projects concerning the center of the city in the modern history of the state of Macedonia that Vilić mentions in the book *Rape Skopje!*(V 2) are the restoration after the mentioned earthquake in 1963 by Kenzo Tange’s project, and the second one is the project “Skopje 2014”. The two projects, although commenced in a completely different period of time (60’s and 70’s are the

¹⁴¹ Ibid.

¹⁴² Nita Çavolli, “A City Surprised- An Analysis of Visual Content and Public Debate, Skopje 2014” (MA Thesis, New York University Skopje, Faculty of Communication and Media Studies, 2012).

¹⁴³ Ibid., 54.

¹⁴⁴ Vilić, *Сунувајме Го Скопје!*(Кн. 2) [*Rape Skopje! V 2*].

decades when most of post-earthquake Skopje was being erected, and 2010 is when the project Skopje 2014 was announced) and built with a different agenda, they are undeniably connected. According to Vilić, the parallel between the projects is made exactly through the opposite character they represent. Post-earthquake Skopje was to be rebuilt by the professional team that will win the international competition in 1965 (a democratic procedure), with an aim of building a future and new identity (with the risk of not accomplishing the whole idea), through the building of a new, coming-to-be memory.¹⁴⁵ The project in its essence was futurist and universal. The project “Skopje 2014”, on the other hand, was presented to the public as a ready to be made project, and thus undebatable and unchangeable (an autocratic procedure), with the aim of reviving the memory of maintaining some old, already confirmed identity. In the latter case, the essence is the local and, above all, the national. In principle, the projects are radically different from the stand point of how the state understands itself in relation to its own reality i.e. “modernistically projectable (in the case of Tange) or as anachronistically retrogressive (in the second case).”¹⁴⁶

Two points connect these categorically different projects. First is the fact that the earthquake the *raison d'être* for both and second, is the character of their implementation: top-down. The project of Kenzo Tange was needed to be executed since the city physically had to be reconstructed. The plan was celebrating the so-called brutalist architecture that was much welcomed by the socialist system. On the other hand, the return of the lost charm of pre-earthquake Skopje was partly mentioned when the governing party presented their reconstruction project “Skopje 2014”. Even though signature buildings have been constructed in the following years according to the plan of Tange’s team, the plan was perhaps too ambitious and experimental to be realized in its fullness. Moreover, the newly projected modern city had no continuity with what used to be a trademark of pre-earthquake Skopje. In his research of the project “Skopje 2014”, anthropologist Nikos Chausidisin, states that the urbanistic chaos in Skopje today is a legacy of a similar concept of disrespect of the existing, manifested in different ways throughout the history of Skopje. He puts an accent on the building of post-earthquake Skopje that came as a top-down project and didn’t comply with the needs and mentality of the local citizens.¹⁴⁷ The public space suffered from discontinuity and it is a problem that’s transmitted from one generation to another as public space “schizophrenia”.¹⁴⁸ From such a perspective, the project “Skopje 2014” is completely common, according to Chausidisin, since such building *ex nihilo* was practiced in the city in

¹⁴⁵ Ibid.

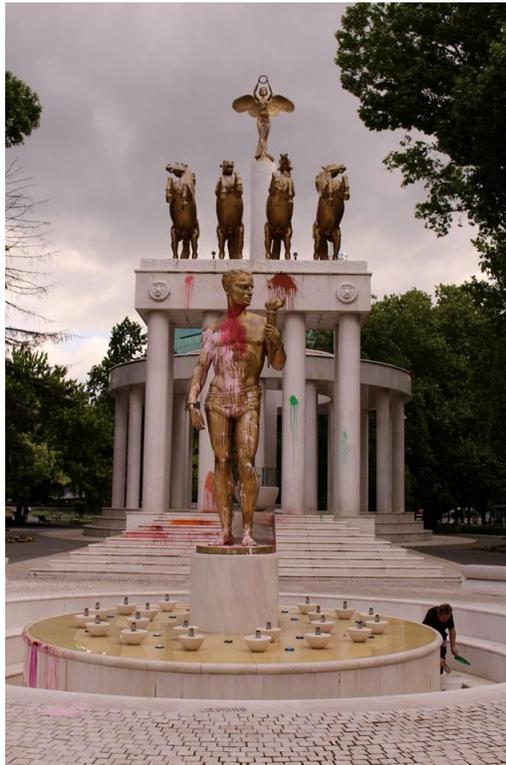
¹⁴⁶ Ibid., 33.

¹⁴⁷ Chausidisin *Проектот Скопје 2014 : Скици За Едно Наредно Истражување.*

¹⁴⁸ Vilić, *Силувајте Го Скопје!*(Кн. 2) [*Rare Skopje! V 2*].

the last 1500 years.¹⁴⁹ The two projects and their discontinuity clashed directly when “Skopje 2014” started physically “attacking” Kenzo Tange’s Skopje. This tendency was pointed out by Chausidisin:

most of the buildings are placed not in free parcels, but in complexes and ambient which are from an urbanistic, architectural and stylistic aspect already formed and rounded up since long time ago, even filled with certain historical and emotional aura.¹⁵⁰



It seems as the project indeed went on with the tradition of building without continuity, since slowly the refacading of modernist architectural buildings into baroque ones became the main aim of the project. The Association of Architects of Macedonia, professors and students of architecture were reasoning against the project from an aesthetic, cultural and urban point of view, whilst other experts and regular citizens scrutinized the cost of the procedure. "This is a crime against public space, culture, urbanism and art - against the city and the citizen,"¹⁵¹ stated professor of urban design Miroslav Grcev, for a BBC article. In the interview conducted for this thesis, Dejan stated that building on public green areas or on top of buildings, which are crucial for the modern architecture in Macedonia, is beyond his understanding. "It's an absolute crime!" he sighs.

¹⁴⁹ Chausidisin, *Проектот Скопје 2014 : Скици За Едно Наредно Истражување*.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid., 19

¹⁵¹ Guy De Launey, "The Makeover That's Divided a Nation," *BBC News*, 30 August 2014, accessed May 26, 2016, <http://www.bbc.com/news/magazine-28951171>.

The on-going construction was not well perceived by many citizens of Skopje as polls show. A survey that was conducted by the Institute of Social Sciences and Humanities in Skopje in September 2013¹⁵² on nationally representative sample of 1240 respondents showed a general negative incline of the sample regarding the project. More precisely, 45, 1% did not like the appearance of the buildings and monuments of "Skopje 2014", while astonishing 73, 1% thought that the construction of this type of buildings and monuments should not continue. The two mentioned projects: Skopje projected by Kenzo Tange and Skopje projected by the current government represent two opposite sides of the city identity and, as such, have divided citizens too. Besides the architectural component, these reconstructions bring to therefor, a debate regarding the way in which spatial change translates into societal change.

4.3. Agonistic and Antagonistic Public Space in Skopje

According to Vilić, the complexity of the project "Skopje 2014" is reaching towards the question of how the society is constructed and organized:

Far from the questions of urbanism and architecture, this particular case (Skopje 2014) shows a usurpation of the democratic structure in the way the chosen ideological options are organising and practicing their power. What is the most concerning about the case is the ideological influence presented as an absolute reality and its imprinting (sealing) in the permanent shaping of the public space. Due to the seriousness and magnitude of the project, for the first time in the history of Macedonia such fierce, serious, thorough and polarly opposed debate is being led regarding the essence of the term public space (as a space in which the interests of the community and its subjects are articulated) and the proposed way and the look of its shaping. On the other side, the way in which the procedure is being run and the execution of this project are a classic example of intrusion in the community system, wherein, the only fitting term about it is the intrusion of the public space from a position of power.¹⁵³

The aggressive building of the "new Skopje" silenced a big number of the citizens in multiple ways. The project is selectively representing a historical narrative with an aim of nation building. The monuments and statues are mostly addressing ethnic Macedonians, which is why the project is even less favored by the Albanian minority in Macedonia. A poll conducted in Skopje regarding the feelings of the citizens about the urban changes, showed that 88.6% of participants from ethnic Albanian origin, reject the changes brought by the project.¹⁵⁴ Another problematic representation, which is seldom mentioned in media, is the lack of female figures in the project, with more than 90% of the monuments and sculptures

¹⁵² Katerina Kolozova, "Skopje 2014 Project and its Effects on the Perception of Macedonian Identity Among the Citizens of Skopje", policy Brief, Skopje: Institute of social sciences and humanities, 30 June 2013, accessed 26 May 2016, <https://infogr.am/skopje-2014-poll-results-by-isshs>.

¹⁵³ Vilić, *Силувајме Го Скопје!*(Кн. 2) [*Rape Skopje! V 2*].

¹⁵⁴ Sinisa Jakov Marusic "Macedonians Tilt Against Skopje Makeover" 18 October 2012 accessed May 27, 2016, <http://www.balkaninsight.com/en/article/poll-most-macedonians-dislike-skopje-s-massive-revamp>.

depicting men as warriors and fighters. Activist and actress Kristina Lelovac¹⁵⁵ mentioned this issue in the interview for this thesis, claiming that most of the reconstructions of the cities in this region are generally masculine, depicting men in position of power. Apart from the exclusion on the bases of ethnicity and gender, the project is absolutely closed to architectural styles, with baroque and neo-classical style already being decided as preferred styles beforehand. The purpose of such decision was to give the city a more classical look as well as a touch of Europeanisms. In the same time, the rejection of the socialist past of the country is evident through the changing of the facades of many buildings erected in that period. However, as mentioned in the book *Rape Skopje! (V 2)*, this was never officially mentioned as a goal by the government, so the only thing the citizens can do is speculate.¹⁵⁶ What is known as argumentation for the project is that it is vital for the feeling of national pride and belonging besides moving closer towards other European cities in the way their centers appear.¹⁵⁷ Oftentimes, the attraction of tourists was declared as an argument for the project too.

And how did the government manage to go through with the project if such a strong opposition existed against it? Though there is a common view of the Macedonians as not being fond of confrontation,¹⁵⁸ another scenario was being written in 2009. That was the year when an announcement was made about a church soon to be built on the main square as the first construction announced regarding “Skopje 2014”. A group of architecture students and other activists organized a peaceful protest on March 28 2009, against the idea of building a church in that place. The students known as “First Arche Brigade” formed a cube on the place where the church was to be built; holding banners “Don’t rape Skopje”. They intended to show how much of the public space would be jeopardized if the building takes place there. In the same time, a counter-protest was organized, namely led by supporters of the Orthodox Church. The protest ended violently, with the students being physically attacked.¹⁵⁹

This event is crucial for understanding the jeopardizing of public space in contemporary Skopje. The violent intrusion of the citizens’ right to proclaim their revolt publicly paved to way for a continuous discourse of silencing opinions which oppose the regime. This issue is conceptualized by Vilić who views the phenomenon of counter-protest as disabling the filtration of opposing views in the public space. A public space where accumulation of opinions is not a possibility goes against the theory of agonistic public space, which Mouffe presented as a precondition for democracy. The creation of political identities happens through democratic struggles, which are always pluralistic and discursively

¹⁵⁵ hereafter Kristina

¹⁵⁶ Heбoјшa Vilić, *Сунувајме Го Скопје!(Кн. 2) [Rape Skopje! V 2]*.

¹⁵⁷ Till Mayer “Macedonian Makeover: Europe’s Flailing Capital of Kitsch,” *Spiegel Online*, accessed May 27, 2016, <http://www.spiegel.de/international/europe/macedonian-capital-skopje-gets-kitsch-makeover-via-skopje2014-project-a-933154.html>.

¹⁵⁸ Many Macedonian proverbs celebrate silence and respect of authority rather than opposition and confrontation. An example is the proverb “a hand bend down will not be cut by the saber”

¹⁵⁹ “Violence Disrupts Student Protests in Skopje.”

constructed¹⁶⁰. In the case of Skopje, the public space is turned into antagonism, Vilić summarizes. Consequently, the possibility of agonistic pluralism is impossible to be achieved as a struggle between opinions, interests and needs.¹⁶¹

4.4. Spatial and Societal Aspects of Public Space in the Case of Skopje

The use (or misuse) of public space in the case of Skopje is an empirical example of the duality of public space, already addressed theoretically in the second chapter of this thesis. Since “Skopje 2014” was announced as an urban, architectural and cultural project it is, *de facto*, influencing the actual city space. As remarked by Vilić, “architecture today is not in its direct form, but more in the ability to create relations and values.”¹⁶² For him, “Skopje 2014” contributed to a complete abolition of any open world view that was to be found in the public space. The fact that the project is being implemented in the public space makes it political *per se*, and since it is realized through art and architecture it also is a cultural project. But on top of everything, argues Vilić, it is an ideological project.¹⁶³

Artist and activist Filip Jovanovski¹⁶⁴ speaks of the possibility of architecture to choreograph our movements in the city. In the interview he stated that the government has been occupying the public space in the last seven or eight years out of ten years of being in power. “The shapes of this occupation show the strong link between politics, urban planning, art and activism. The political apparatus throughout different mechanisms, the most dominant ones of which are art and culture, is maneuvering our bodies and lives,”¹⁶⁵ he comments. Along similar lines, Kristina connects the idea of free public space to a square, close to the concept of *agora*. She believes that “Skopje 2014” is a nationalist project and at a certain period of time she used to avoid passing through the city center. Later they occupied everything, she says in the interview:

In Skopje there is no square anymore. And squares are places where people should think, share opinions and plan something together, and that is gone. Look at what is happening now. In this moment in Skopje there is no free space where we can have a protest. We are crammed. If a stampede happens, we go to hell.¹⁶⁶

Dejan speaks of the same dangers from an architectural perspective. He explains that in a city there must be free spaces, at least for emergency situations, if nothing else. He argues that it is unthinkable to build everywhere, since people need free public space. Dejan states that free spaces are left from previous generations with a purpose and it is vulgar to build in such a way. “The citizen has the right to

¹⁶⁰ Mouffe, *Agonistics*.

¹⁶¹ Hebojша Vilić, *Сунувајме Го Скопје!*(Кн. 2) [*Rape Skopje! V 2*].

¹⁶² *Ibid.*, 103

¹⁶³ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁴ hereafter Filip

¹⁶⁵ Filip Jovanovski, interviewed by author, Skopje, April 17, 2016, translated transcript.

¹⁶⁶ Kristina Lelovac, interviewed by author, Skopje, April 16, 2016, translated transcript.

free space. If you have no money for a café, there must be a bench on the square. You pay for it! You don't pay to go on the square and see a bronze lion!"¹⁶⁷ The free areas must be preserved, he argues strongly. Concerning the "suffocation" of the public space in Skopje, Filip breaks the argument down on two levels:

The state is in some form of totalitarian society that controls all segments and it is dragging culture as a tool. If we move from that position, the danger is on few levels. It chokes all openings for the possibility for democratic action. They are literally occupied physically, in the public space and through the institutions. I believe we cannot discuss public space without talking about public institutions.¹⁶⁸

He states that it is important to understand public space not only as a spatial dimension, but also as an articulation of the democratic voice of the citizens, through institutions that belong to the citizens:

From the *agora*, to an institution, to a museum for contemporary art, all paid with public money; they are supposed to articulate a certain community problem. Thus, the institutions which are paid with public money should examine society in a critical manner and, in our case, it is the other way around. You pay the institutions and they are an extended arm of the propaganda.¹⁶⁹

He believes that the politics of the Government is changing the physical public space of Skopje according to their ideological program, but in the same time influencing the institutions in the similar manner – by closing them for alternative ideas. Hence, it is possible to speak of the intrusion of the democratic space, through the occupation of physical space:

They change the detailed urbanistic plan overnight and destroy public space to build an institution they conceive both as an institution and as a building. In such a way they are dominating not the physical space alone, but also the public discourse.¹⁷⁰

All things considered, from the position of the interviewees, critical publications, independent media¹⁷¹, as well as personal observation of the researcher¹⁷², the effect of the project "Skopje 2014" can be observed on multiple levels. Firstly, the most obvious of them all is the physical modification (reconstruction) of the city center. The city has completely lost its modernist, simplistic look, hidden behind baroque and neo-classic replicas of facades and sculptures of national heroes. Second is the division of people into supporters and opponents. High level of disconnection of the locals who disagree with the project was generated, on the excuse of building a strong national identity. Moreover, the

¹⁶⁷ Dejan Ivanovski, interviewed by author, Skopje, April 18, 2016, translated transcript.

¹⁶⁸ Filip Jovanovski, interviewed by author.

¹⁶⁹ *ibid.*

¹⁷⁰ *ibid.*

¹⁷¹ This point regarding the media is worded in such way since the national television; most of the private channels and the majority of the newspapers failed to remain independent and serve as a tool for propaganda. The Freedom House Report of 2016 labeled Macedonian media as non-free, whereas in the previous years it was labeled as partly-free.

¹⁷² I am not referring to field work here, but rather my own experience as a citizen of that city.

project deepened already existing gaps in Skopje's communities on religious, ethnic or political basis.¹⁷³ Thirdly, the urban interventions were introduced on the expense of many green areas and parks in the city center.¹⁷⁴ Lastly, the cost of the project financed by public money has risen drastically. The price of Skopje's remake moved from the announced €80 million in the start, to around €560 million.¹⁷⁵ Nowadays, the public space of the city is absolutely transformed in every aspect. The project altered the urban reality by:

impos[ing] a new discourse, language and self-experience of the citizen in Skopje-forc[ing] new values on the citizens by imposing values of history, locality, violence, masculinity, epicness, on the account of the values gained thanks to the major international intervention after the devastating earthquake in 1963, which were cosmopolitanism, solidarity, transparency, openness and sentimental relating to both the ottoman heritage and modernism.¹⁷⁶

The project "Skopje 2014" is a multilayered issue and needs a separate analysis. This chapter did not investigate and preset the project in depth, but rather offered basic background on the topic. Nonetheless, what this chapter indicates is that two different urban identities have, in a way, clashed in the public space, increasingly so after the implementation of "Skopje 2014". On the one hand, there is Tange's legacy – a modernist project associated with futurism, cosmopolitanism, solidarity and minimalism. On the other hand, there is the newly introduced "Skopje 2014", associated with nationalism, antiquity and kitsch. The first one is a symbol of international solidarity, whilst the second one of profligacy. The two projects seem irreconcilable and cannot co-exist in one urban space, given that the on-going urban project is concealing the older one. The conflict between these two identities represents the antagonism of the public space in Skopje which works in opposition to democratic struggles on the bases of agonism and pluralism. Even though for Mouffe, pluralism means that ultimate compromise is not possible, yet, "democratic politics should create the conditions for the conflict to find its expression in agonistic terms, avoiding that it becomes antagonistic."¹⁷⁷ What the two projects have in common, however, is the process of their conception: top-down. Both projects speak of political ideologies which in a way influenced the public space from a position of power. In the latter case though, the influence on public space goes into the realm of intrusion and as a result creates antagonistic space.

¹⁷³ Bertan Selim, "Skopje 2014 - A Recipe for Urban Disintegration", *Balkan Insight*, accessed 30 May 2016, <http://www.balkaninsight.com/en/article/skopje-2-aa4-a-recipe-for-urban-disintegration>.

¹⁷⁴ Ivana Dragsic, "Skopje Facelift: Megalomaniac Project Devours the City," accessed May 30, 2016, https://ba.boell.org/sites/default/files/uploads/2016/01/how_skopje_2014_ate_the_skopje_commons_extended.pdf.

¹⁷⁵ "True Cost of 'Skopje 2014' Revealed" accessed 30 May 2016, <http://www.balkaninsight.com/en/article/true-cost-of-skopje-2014-revealed>.

¹⁷⁶ Ivana Dragsic, "Skopje Facelift: Megalomaniac Project Devours the City"

¹⁷⁷ Nico Carpentier and Bart Cammaerts, "Hegemony, Democracy, Agonism and Journalism: An Interview with Chantal Mouffe," *Journalism Studies* 7, no. 6 (December 2006): 964–75.

Nonetheless, the intrusion of the public space from the position of power gave birth to a post-effect, also to be faced in the public space of Skopje. Urban mobilization developed significantly in the city of Skopje in the period after 2010, mainly as a reaction (direct or indirect) to the political situation in the country. In the next chapter the focus will be placed upon urban mobilizations which operate in the public space of Skopje, generating space for plurality and bottom-up urban (re)shaping. The results are framed in correspondence with the theory on urban social movements in post-socialist cities, presented in the literature review.

Chapter 5: A new culture of urban resistance

The post-effect of the political and social developments in the suggested period of analysis for this thesis is the noticeable increase of urban mobilization in the city of Skopje. Filip mentions the pressure that the government system created as giving birth to the culture of resistance:

If intimately speaking, I am happy that the pressure of the system created an opportunity for the conception and networking of organization bottom-up, as grass root system of reaction. It is a natural reaction and evolution. You are repressed and you find ways to cope with the situation. A lot of social capital was created, and the question is through which outlet it will breathe out.¹⁷⁸

Vilić too speaks of the culture of resistance as a positive outcome of the crisis caused by the current political events in the country. Furthermore, he predicted the ways in which the resistance evolved from few dispersed protesting groups to joint civic action of urban refacading:

Already a post-effect has been conceived—protesting and critical art and culture, something that Macedonia always lacked and something which is of greatest importance for preserving the spirit of the City. I am convinced that the project will generate even more reactions—it was started by the First Archi-Brigade, it was confirmed by the “hugging of GTC”, and it will continue, I expect, with rhizomatic graffiting of the architecture and the monuments as a strategy of (this time) urban (in opposition of the current centric and violent) refacading.¹⁷⁹

Since the movements which were taken as units of analysis are quite diverse, the typology of social movements in post-socialist societies by Císařs was used. According to that typology made on the criteria of mobilization capacity and transactional capacity, all except two movements clearly fall under the category of “self-organized civic activism”. One of the exceptions is the initiative “I love GTC” that could be characterized as civic self-organization, transactional and at times episodic mass mobilization. The other exception is the “Colorful Revolution” which fits to the civic self-organization category as well as episodic mass mobilization. Hence, civic self-organized activism which is based “on many events, no

¹⁷⁸ Jovanovski, interviewed by author.

¹⁷⁹ Vilić, *Сунувајме Го Скопје!*(Кн. 2) [*Rape Skopje! V 2*], 120.

organizations, and few participants”¹⁸⁰ is quite prominent. The same starting point was used in *Urban Grassroots Movements in Central and Eastern Europe* which identified four prevailing themes while analyzing self-organized, urban activism in post-socialist cities of Central and Eastern Europe. The results of the case of Skopje will be presented in the following sections through the prism of the following four themes: 1.The negotiation of the urban meaning; 2.The “urban” as a space for agency and basis for citizenship 3.The role and challenges of alliance-building in urban mobilizations and 4.Urban movements and local governance.¹⁸¹After the four themes, a discussion on the use of artistic methods as a tool for activism will be deliberated on in more depth, as a specificity of this thesis. Though this theme could be found along all the other themes as well, more attention will be put on it, since part of the research problem of the thesis is not only the rise of urban social movements and their influence on the public space, but also the place of artistic activism in the political resistance. The last section of the chapter will serve as an overview of the discussed themes, before some concluding remarks.

5.1. Four Predominant Elements of Urban Social Movements in Post-Socialist Cities

a. The Negotiation of the Urban Meaning

One of the predominant themes in *Urban Grassroots Movements in Central and Eastern Europe* is the negotiation of the urban meaning. This theme is dealing not with tangible outcomes of projects, but rather explores “the social meaning of urban activism in the post-socialist context.”¹⁸² By a rejection of the iconography of the socialist past as well as the symbolism of the neoliberal city, urban activists are attaching new meanings to the urban public space and forming a unique identity of the public space. In such a way they “re-appropriate and re-create the city.”¹⁸³This is often achieved through countercultural practices, performative acts which erase the boundary between participants and spectators, urban heritage protection, neighborhood struggles and the politics of anti-politics. The right to the city is usually a prevailing motivation for the actions. The *urban habitus* compiles cosmopolitan ideals, in contrast to the “peasant mentality” of national pride.

In the case of Skopje, a good number of urban activists are dealing with the issue of the lack of independent, cultural centers and spaces for expression and maintenance of identities which do not conform to the ideals pushed by “Skopje 2014”. The radio “Radio Free Skopje” is an artistic project implemented by artist Gjorgje that focuses on interaction, participation and inclusivity as a method of

¹⁸⁰ Císařs, “A Typology of Extra-Parliamentary Political Activism in Post-Communist Settings: The Case of the Czech Republic,”143.

¹⁸¹ Jacobsson, “The Development of Urban Grassroots Movements in Central and Eastern Europe”.

¹⁸² Ibid., 16.

¹⁸³ Ibid.,33.

working. The radio project can be perceived as a public sculpture (a temporary project) which was to be found in the “Mobile/montage gallery” in a park, the gallery itself being another urban project. The radio started as a six day artistic project, when the “Mobile/Montage Gallery” was transformed into a radio receiver, and the inside of the gallery was turned into a studio. The radio is envisioned as an: “open artistic platform that unites [...] citizens to voice out challenges arising from the ongoing political and economic crisis.”¹⁸⁴ As an artist himself, Gjorgje felt the lack of such content in the media and wished to respond to that issue with a concrete solution-providing a medium. The “Mobile/montage gallery” is similarly like the radio – a project created to address public issues. Filip, one of the creators of the gallery, elaborated that the space is supposed to fulfil the void in the city regarding independent space for artistic and cultural projects. The aim of these two projects is to create a sustainable space that will provide a public service for the society. In that sense, these artistic projects are addressing a public issue from a counterculture perspective through DIY (Do-It-Yourself)¹⁸⁵ activism.

Another group that has acquired plenty of public attention and is literally taking over the urban space as a performing stage is the political choir “Singing Skopians”. Their main strategy is following political actions and then reacting to it in a creative way. They are protesting in singing, usually in front of or in the area of the (a) relevant institution, where they arrive unannounced, thus work with the element of surprise. The choir started performing actively in 2009 and was one of the first activist groups to publicly address the project “Skopje 2014”. The choir has been focusing on different issues throughout the years of their existence such as: the right to the city, against the restriction of the abortion law, the hate speech in media, the workers’ rights etc. Due to their distinctive style of appearance and performance, they have become a recognizable activist group. According to Kristina, one of the oldest members of the group, the choir has had a real impact, especially in the first years of activism. By using the city as a platform for expression, the group managed to turn seemingly neutral city spots (a corner of the square, the pavement in front of the government or stairs near the church) into politically charged places, bringing the issue “on the spot”. By posting their videos on You Tube, they have archived the symbolic transformation of the chosen places.

The “Singing Skopians” is not the only group where Kristina is taking an active part. She is also one of the co-creators of the organization Tiiii!Inc.– an all-female collective that started off by organizing alternative cultural events in Skopje such as the annual feminist festival “Прво на Женско”¹⁸⁶. Tiiii!Inc. made a collaboration with the independent radio “Kanal 103” for their urban project “Intimate Maps of the Female Cities”, which aims to create an alternative female typography of

¹⁸⁴Radiofree Skopje, “Radio Free Skopje,” accessed 1 May 2016, <https://radiofreeskopje.wordpress.com/>.

¹⁸⁵ Jacobsson, “The Development of Urban Grassroots Movements in Central and Eastern Europe”.

¹⁸⁶ Translating literally as „First and a Girl”, eluding to a proverb which celebrates the first born if it's a boy. Hence the festival is criticizing this idea by celebrating the first born girl saying “Lucky first, it's a girl!”

the city. The project started as an answer to the masculine reconstruction of Skopje – a phenomenon also to be seen in the other bigger cities of the region. Their plan is to develop the project in at least all the capitals of ex-Yugoslavia, as all of them are being transformed in a similar – masculine way, due the autocratic political culture in the past 20 years, explains Kristina. She believes that all of these cities are, in a way, occupied by power and strength, presented in the public arena as stereotypical masculine symbols. The leading idea of the project is to focus on the concept of “intimate” as an old feminist concept related to the division of public/private. The project has developed into the direction of creating an alternative map of the city which relies on toponyms that are intimate and have a female connotation. The points were spaces that in the moment are not experienced as feminine and, “due to the newly given identity, would illuminate as such.”¹⁸⁷ Men and women from different backgrounds were invited for the creation of the alternative maps. They were driving around the city in a car, making the map a form of live performance, through a live streaming on the radio “Kanal 103”. The guests of the show were asked to direct the car to different places around Skopje which for them have an immanent female connotation. To add to that, the guests were also asked to connect the places they are selecting with songs that would go live on the radio. When asked about the effect and reach of the alternative mapping, it was obvious that it is a touchy subject. Radio “Kanal 103” is an alternative radio, only followed by specific groups of people, thus the intimate maps were also only experienced by a limited number of people. However, it is not likely that such a project would be accepted by a commercial radio or TV, states Kristina. She believes that if there is some financial support for the creation of an actual map, it could actually have a real impact on the urban experience. The project is, for now, working in the realm of symbolic urban space and the possibility for its opening towards new urban identities.

Other urban mobilizations however are struggling with green area protection or heritage preservation; directly confronting the effects of “Skopje 2014”. The movement “Park defenders” occupied a small park in the center of the city – one of the few preserved in the area, after its destruction was announced for the purpose of creating space for a government institution. The group camped in the park for more than a month, adopting the usual “occupy techniques”, such as offering cultural events, film screenings and workshops in the park. The trend of using occupation as a method of urban activism is not uncommon for the post-socialist context¹⁸⁸. Their summer camp was put to an end forcefully, with a police action in the middle of the night. The trees were cut few days after. The group of defenders issued a statement on their official Facebook page claiming that it was those five “insignificant” trees that showed the selective justice in the country: “through those 5 “insignificant” trees

¹⁸⁷ Lelovac, interviewed by author.

¹⁸⁸ Zhelnina, “‘Hanging Out,’ Creativity, and the Right to the City”

it was shown that the trademark of this society is the lack of dialog, personal vanities and revanchism which clearly reflect the democratic deficit.”¹⁸⁹

The most vital preservation movement in Skopje is an urban initiative against the re-make of modernist buildings into baroque ones. The anti-“Skopje 2014” movement started with “Don’t rape Skopje!” in 2008, but it became more structured with the initiative “I love GTC” aiming at defending the authenticity of the city center mall built in 1973 by famous architect and professor Zivko Popovski. The initiative was created after it was announced that, as part of the project “Skopje 2014”, the shopping center “GTC” will get a “brand, new” look – baroque one, that is. As for many citizens of Skopje, this building is one of the symbols of the modern city of Skopje and the heart of the city, hence a strong movement against its “baroquisation” was mobilized. The initiator of the movement Danica Cigi Pavlovska, at that time the president of the Association of Architects of Macedonia, explained the value of the building when interviewed for the thesis:

What we have as a phenomenon in Skopje is the combination of commercial content and social one in one public space, named GTC (City Trade Center). It is not just a mall, a street, a crossroad or a space for cultural events, but all of that together. Also, it has a very distinct aesthetic dimension, normally for the moment in which it was contracted – sample of the modern architecture of the second half of the 20th century.¹⁹⁰

Vilić speaks of the social element of the building that was especially illuminated after the decision for its modification was announced. Only then did the citizens realize the subtle ways in which the building is engraved in the urban organism. According to him, it is by definition the purpose of any contemporary project to become embedded in the “us” and from this relation a new better, social individual to be created, with an open world view. For him, the form of the GTC represents exactly that.¹⁹¹ Dejan, also involved in the movement, argues that GTC is perhaps one of the 3 most important buildings in Macedonia. It is not just important as an architectural piece, but also as a public space. Such building that can be used by anyone is hard to find today and that is the quality. In his view:

the difference between a city mall and GTC is that one of them has a public space to be used by anyone and anytime, and the other is a controlled space, with a guard, where you cannot pass with a bike or a dog; there are rules of behavior dictated by the capital. GTC is open; it is a street that connects the most important points of the city center.¹⁹²

Due to the symbolic and practical value of this structure for the city, a group of architects and students started campaigning for the preservation of the authenticity of the building. The campaign got the official name “Го Сакам ГТЦ“(I love GTC). Dejan explains that they wanted to have a simple, catchy name

¹⁸⁹ “Паркобрани,” statement announced on Facebook page on September 16, 2013, accessed 27 July, 2016., <https://www.facebook.com/Паркобрани-543758162358681/>

¹⁹⁰ Pavlovska, interviewed by author.

¹⁹¹ Vilić, *Силувајте Го Скопје!*(Кн. 2) [*Rape Skopje! V 2*].

¹⁹² Ivanovski, interviewed by author.

which will mention the name of the building and will have a positive overtone. Everything was made enthusiastically, out of pure drive, recalls Dejan. The first event took place in June 2013. The organizers invited people for an urban gathering. Professors, artists, architects spoke of the value of the building, the memories held in its structure and the importance to preserve it as such. Afterwards, all participants together holding hands symbolically hugged the building in order to show the importance and worth it has for them. The symbolic hugging of the building was proposed by Danica on one of the meetings. She explains that she wanted to convey an emotional element through the protest. Dejan sees the hugging as a “romantic gesture”. It would sound stupid if I say it was feminine, but for sure it was romantic, the holding of hands that is. The event was soft and humanistic. There was no politics there. Only revolt and people that know their own city.”¹⁹³ On the other hand, the hugging was also conceptualized as a “human shield” of protection.

The initiative “I Love GTC” acquired great public support. Through their methods of action and communication, they managed to unite people around GTC (both physically and allegorically) and create an urban legend out of the building. What is significant to point out regarding this initiative is that it demonstrates the problematic features of the public space in the frame of post-socialism. The mall from the 70s is open, accessible and social. It is a home for the homeless and a shortcut on a rainy day. It is a building that melts into the vibe of the city. In its character, it is much more a square than a shopping destination. As such, GTC is an antipode of the “American mall”– a symbol of the neo-liberal city. Such mall is uninvited in the center of Skopje, clearly states the initiative. On the other hand, the building is praised as a “pearl”¹⁹⁴ of modernist, socialist architecture. It is a testimonial of a certain time and reality of the city and as such, it is to be preserved. But then again this building combines these to personalities together. Judging by its purpose, it is a commercial center, but one built in socialist times. It is a testimonial of the difference between the post-soviet space and post-socialist space where private property was allowed to a certain extent. This case stretches beyond the assumptions made in “The Development of Urban Grassroots Movements in Central and Eastern Europe”, where the negotiation of the urban meaning by activists is conceptualist as a rejection of the socialist past as well as the neoliberal present.¹⁹⁵ Oftentimes, according to Jacobsson’s volume, the urban movements draw on their pre-socialist cultural heritage as symbolic source of urban identity. However, that is rarely the case in Skopje. What we can see from the data is a certain praise of the socialist past of the city, especially as the direct opposite of “Skopje 2014”. In that sense, the legacy of Kenzo Tange’s project and the GTC

¹⁹³ Ivanovski, interviewed by author.

¹⁹⁴ Vilić, *Супрвајме Го Скопје!*(Кн. 2) [*Rape Skopje! V 2*].

¹⁹⁵ Jacobsson, “The Development of Urban Grassroots Movements in Central and Eastern Europe”.

building being part of this legacy, is seen as urban, cosmopolitan and progressive and “Skopje 2014” as kitsch, national and backwards.¹⁹⁶

The rejection of the project “Skopje 2014” from the urban culture can also be observed through the form of the latest protests in Skopje. The last examined unit in the thesis is the “Colorful Revolution”, which is the official name of the ongoing protests that commenced on April 12 2016, with clear political demands against the current establishment.¹⁹⁷ The protest can be perceived as a culmination of most of the movements of resistance appearing in the country in the last five to seven years.¹⁹⁸ What is peculiar about these protests in respect to urban interventions is that their main method of protesting is paint. The method of coloring was introduced already on the 4th and the 5th protest, which in a way branded the revolution a “colorful” in only few days. The legend of how the coloring exactly started is rather unknown even though there are few speculations regarding the initiators of the idea. Nonetheless, as it is a collective action, the authorship in this case is irrelevant. When the protesting crowd approached Porta Makedonija (Arc Macedonia) in the center of Skopje, splashes of red, blue and green paint splashed on its white facade. The Arc was also built as part of the “Skopje 2014” as one of the most controversial creations of the project and, as such, it was creatively “attacked” at the protest on the 15th of April. The paint was removed the morning after and the act was labeled as vandalism and destruction of cultural heritage by pro-government media. However, protesters continued in the same manner, arguing that they are beautifying what was constructed from public money and anyhow, due to the undemocratic way in which the project was built, it does not bear any urban or official cultural value. More paint was applied again on the Arc on the next protest in addition to written phrases in black, such as: “Грабеж” (Robbery), “Ружна ви е портата” (Your arc is ugly), “Слобода за Народот” (Freedom for the people), as shown below, on pictures 1 and 2, both taken during the field observation of the protests on the April 16, in Skopje.

¹⁹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁹⁷ “About the Protests | Протести Македонија 2015/2016| Protests Macedonia 2015/2016,” accessed 22 June, 2016, http://protestiram.info/?page_id=40.

¹⁹⁸ the political crisis and the wiretapping scandal that led to this situation is explained in the third chapter.



Picture 1



Picture 2

Some protesters claimed that the method of painting will weaken the political efficiency of the movements, whilst others were praising this way of protest, asking for more direct artistic actions that can blend with the protest movement. Simona Spirovska¹⁹⁹, a regular “protest painter”, explains the rationale behind this approach:

Look, to be a victim of the kitsch that they brought these 10 years (and I don't mean just Skopje 2014, but all segments of the social and communal living), it had to result in resistance that deals with aesthetics. And the aestheticization, or rather re- aestheticization is not key, but the reclaiming of space which essentially should be ours. We are marking the institutions which make shameful decisions on expense of the citizens.²⁰⁰

In Filip's view, who is also to be seen at the protest regularly, the coloring is a catharsis and symbolic action. For him, the aesthetic is not in the color, nor in the stain that the color leaves. Rather it is the moment of throwing it. The communal sense and benefit from it is the collective act which lasts in a self-organized action by the citizens. Moreover, by figuratively attacking the symbols of the establishment, the protests gain visibility and reactions. “The system gets annoyed when the demonstrators are leaving authentic marks on the symbols of their power”, he concludes.

b. The Urban as a Space for Agency and Basis for Citizenship

The urban activism in the post-socialist context is small-scale and usually overlooked. However, it could serve as a solid base for the development of a stronger sense of civic commitment, demand for rights and justice and influence in public policy, argues Jacobsson. The rise of mobilization could serve as a

¹⁹⁹ hereafter Simona

²⁰⁰ Simona Spirovska, online interview with author, July 12, 2016.

renewed basis for citizenship in the social context. This is of particular importance in post-authoritarian (or still authoritarian) societies, where a critical mass of people who try to influence the public policy is not common. Jacobsson articulates this as a political becoming of the post-socialist citizen:

Taking practical action thus means a regaining of individual and collective agency, serving as a future basis for citizenship, which is of particular importance in post-authoritarian, low-trust societies. Such processes are more empowering and transformative than immediately evident and thus their importance goes beyond the concrete mobilization and its tangible outcomes. We could conceptualize this as a 'political becoming', of democratic subject-formation and gaining a sense of agency and political efficacy.²⁰¹

In the case of Skopje too, a relevant outcome of the political crisis and gradual rise of activism is the empowerment of the citizens. Danica believes that Macedonian citizens have not yet developed a strong sense of democracy. As such, it is not widely practiced that through public discourse citizens communicate their needs and achieve certain results. In her opinion, raising civil society awareness was one of the first aims of the activists in Skopje. Grass-root actions, artistic activism, local initiatives and similar actions encourage citizens to be more active in the public discourse and try to influence the political arena. Gjorgje also focuses on participation and engagement through his art and believes that what is happening in Skopje currently is extremely important for the maturing of the democratic system. "The citizens' activism is fascinating", he says, "but it needs more time to develop". Filip believes that, even though most of the actions he has taken part of are pointing to the fact that a small number of people are part of that critical culture, a general rise of the interest in civil matters can be noticed in the country. In these last years it was not so uncommon to see thousands of people on a protest or signing a petition. That is something that was not common in the past. Moreover, many groups go beyond the tools of protesting or organizing symbolic events, but they try to influence public policies as well.

The citizens' initiative "We are Karposh 4", for instance, is a neighborhood initiative which at first consisted of around 150 citizens who are rebelling against the building in their neighborhood on the expense of green areas. The group grew bigger and created a citizens' initiative in order to stop the changes of the detailed urbanistic plan and started gathering signatures for a local referendum. Even though they did not collect enough signatures for a referendum, the group continued with actions on raising awareness and urging the officials to quit the project.

The initiative "I love GTC" started as a symbolic action which sought to evoke an emotional relationship between the citizen and the building through protests and events. Nevertheless, the battle for GTC was happening in the legal space too, since the initiative started campaigning for a local referendum for the protection of the authenticity of GTC. Both Danica and Dejan mentioned the importance of the institutional part of the struggle. Beyond the hugging, the artistic interventions and

²⁰¹ Jacobsson, "The Development of Urban Grassroots Movements in Central and Eastern Europe".

Instagram-actions, the initiative sought to solve the issue through an institutional path and use the legal framework and democratic capabilities of the country. Ivanovski considers that “it may begin with some protest or some activity, but it I think it is preferable to close it legally”. In Danica’s judgment “the combination of diverse methods is the best”. Guerilla actions, protests, petitions; it can all be successful if it is authentic. Sometimes the problem itself reveals which method is the most suitable at which time. In Danica’s eyes, the referendum was a test for the citizens regarding the relevance that such direct political instruments have for them. The call for local referendum was already a big leap for the initiative, since this was the second local referendum to happen in the history of the country. The referendum was prepared with no resources whatsoever, hence guerrilla actions were used for promotion. One of the methods was a simple announcement about the referendum: “GTC to stay urban. Vote ‘for’ on the referendum”, written on a piece of bed sheet or table cloth and exposed on random terraces in the center. In this way, citizens were not only spectators and consumers of propaganda, but they had a chance to become active participants. According to Dejan, this approach is more sincere than normal billboards. With a turnout of 40.46%, the referendum did not pass the legal census of 51% +, but more than 96% of the votes were “for” maintaining the authentic look. Danica is optimistic about it, replying that:

“the percentage of people that went out to vote for the referendum is higher than the percentage that voted for president of the country. For me, it is a great achievement and motivation, in some sense success as well. It can be read as an activation of citizenship and the spirit of the citizens. Act of solidarity and rising of awareness regarding the power of the word spoken publicly.”²⁰²

The initiative demonstrated the possibility for the use of direct democracy as a tool to bring civil issues closer to the citizens. Simona from the “Colorful Revolution” also mentions the awakening of the citizens and the repudiation of fear as the highest achievement of the protests: “Everyday more people break free from the gyves and get encouraged to go to the streets. Finally, the citizens realized that the only way to get their rights is by fighting for them.”²⁰³

c. The Role and Challenges of Alliance-Building in Urban Mobilizations

The civil society in the post-socialist context is often ascribed with the low level of social capital as a leading feature.²⁰⁴The reason for this is usually connected to the “weakness of governance and public administration, and by the widespread corruption which breeds distrust of public institutions.”²⁰⁵ Since

²⁰² Pavlovska, interviewed by author.

²⁰³ Spirovska, online interview with author.

²⁰⁴ Jacobsson, “The Development of Urban Grassroots Movements in Central and Eastern Europe”.

²⁰⁵ Senat Daut, “Social Capital in Macedonia and Its Impact on Economic Growth” (Center for Economic Analyses, CEA, 2006). accessed 28 June 2016, http://cea.org.mk/documents/studii/Third_USAID_report_social_capita.pdf.

social capital is a precondition for a strong civil society, the post-socialist civil society is often characterized as underdeveloped, both internally and apropos policy-makers. However, some level of trust and feeling of empowerment does exist in respect to local institutions such as municipal authorities, as indicated by a research on social capital made in Macedonia.²⁰⁶ From that point of view, urban activism is beneficial for the straightening of civil society by creating links and collaborations amongst the activist groups but also in trying to influence decisions on the local level. Jacobsson speaks of the importance of alliance-building within different civil society groups, and mentions “the right to the city” as an overall theme that unites the local struggles nowadays.²⁰⁷ The character and demands of the movements is something that is identified as a possible ground for rainbow alliances.²⁰⁸ Usually, the urban social movements are of non-violent character, they have a pacifistic and at times playful character. Most of the interviewees for the case of Skopje also ascribed such features to their actions: peaceful, symbolic, urban, pluralistic, civic, etc. Regarding “I love GTC”, Pavlovska comments that she was never in favor of some militant, radical solutions like lying in front of a bulldozer. Rather, their methods of action were directed towards bringing people together, being inclusive, pluralistic and offer a gesture of peacefulness. With the hugging of the building they wanted to share a kind of hippie ambiance. The initiative tried to stay original and highly inclusive by engaging different groups of citizens. Events were organized in the park surrounding the building where ordinary citizens were sharing their personal relation to the building, while children were included with art workshops and games. The campaign was also popular on social media where different actions appeared, one of which was an Instagram photo competition. Lastly, debates on a more expert level were organized and a volume about the building was written. Due to the intensive campaigning of the initiative, their collaborations with NGOs and out of the box methods of communication with the citizens, all three protests had high attendance level.

The bridges between the analyzed movements are evident. Oftentimes, if not always, they have supported each other's actions by active involvement or just attendance. For instance, the group “Park Defenders” was explicitly supporting the referendum for GTC on their Facebook page while the creators of the “Montage/Mobile Gallery” were part of the organizers of the initiative “I love GTC”. Some of them could be seen singing with the “Singing Skopians” or taking part in a show in “Radio Free Skopje”. The connections are never-ending. However, though networking within a certain type of environment in Skopje is evident and urban activism did create civil society relations, it is questionable whether urban activism reaches out beyond these specific “urban” circles and has an impact on the

²⁰⁶ Ibid.

²⁰⁷ Jacobsson, "The Development of Urban Grassroots Movements in Central and Eastern Europe".

²⁰⁸ Ibid.

broader society. Jacobsson poses the question whether urban actions can be divisive as well, on the level of distinction of who fits in the urban vision and who does not:

in societies as marked by urban-rural cleavage as those of Central and Eastern Europe, the “urban habitus” also becomes a demarcation device and claim to superiority in relation to the uneducated, primitive habitus of the rural dweller or other “backward” groups [...] The social distance between the new middle-class and “ordinary people” in the increasingly stratified and polarized post-socialist societies tends to compound this challenge.²⁰⁹

The issue of the inability of cross-class alliances does exist in the case of Skopje. Moreover, the strongest divisions are made on bases of supporters and opponents of “Skopje 2014”, where the latter are portraying themselves as the urban class. To illustrate this, both Danica and Dejan characterize the crowd that participated in the “I love GTC” events as urban people who know the true value of the city.

However, cooperation across class, age and social status did start happening with the mass anti-government mobilizations in 2015 as well as 2016 with the “Colorful revolution.” Within few hours spent around the protesters it becomes clear that indeed there is diversity. From children to elderly, intellectuals to workers – the movement erases the borders that may have existed before. Simona, says that the reason why the revolution is colorful is not only because of the paint they use. Rather, “the colorfulness refers to the citizens as well. It stems from their differences (in every regard), fighting for justice together, side by side. No one invited us to the streets, so every single person counts.”²¹⁰ Taking everything into consideration, it is difficult to categorize smaller civic actions as all-inclusive and plural, since they are usually performed by and for a certain set of citizens. As opposed to that, it appears as though recent, more massive events can actually mobilize a wide range of citizens from different backgrounds.

d. Urban Movements and Local Governance

The last theme discussed in *Urban Grassroots Movements in Central and Eastern Europe* is the professionalization and institutionalization of the urban movements. The volume concludes that some of the movements avoid any type of formalization, while others have attained certain legal status, mostly for funding reasons. However, most of the movements are based on voluntary work with bottom-up way of functioning.²¹¹

The situation in this regard is rather alike in the urban mobilizations in Skopje. Some of the movements have been working with no resources; such as “Singing Skopians”, “I love GTC”, as well as the green movements. Others have had some limited resources from funds, such as “Intimate Maps of

²⁰⁹ Ibid.

²¹⁰ Spirkovska, online interview with author.

²¹¹ Jacobsson, *Urban Grassroots Movements in Central and Eastern Europe*.



Singing Skopians

the Female Cities” which acquired some funding for the gas they were using while “driving the maps”. As opposed to the observation in *Grassroots Movements in Central and Eastern Europe* that funding for these groups is usually domestic, in the case of Skopje, it is usually from foreign funds. In respect to professionalization, though most of the groups work on voluntary basis and are inclusive, the situation is slightly different with the artistic projects which, aside from the fact that serve a communal cause, they are also projects of professionals. Furthermore, the initiative “I love GTC” was initiated and carried out by a group of architects. Even though the work was on voluntary basis and out of personal enthusiasm, the group was a professional one. Another development touched upon in this theme is the level of participation of urban movements in the local governance. The region of Central and Eastern Europe shows different patterns in this respect, especially on the line of European Union membership. Since the union imposes some models of cooperation between civil society and local institutions, there is difference in this matter between members and non-members of the EU.²¹² Cooperation between local authorities and activist groups is familiar in cities in Poland, Slovakia and Lithuania, amongst others, in the form of participatory budgeting, panels, discussions and collaborations between public officials and urban activists.²¹³

This is not the case in Skopje. The interviews generated data which defines the public institutions as deaf, dead, propagandistic and politicized. Filip strongly believes that the institutions must be the key of the struggle, but wonders if there is a possibility for them to be transformed, or new ones must be created. Though he is certain that the citizens’ resistance must be institutionalized, at this

²¹² Ibid.

²¹³ Ibid.

moment there is no dialogue with the institutions, he argues. On the other hand, the independent scene is not strong enough to create a serious (not symbolic) opposition. Gjorgje also addresses the problem with the institutions as a reason why many artists use the urban space for creative actions, instead of state funded museums. When asked if the “Colorful Revolution” tries to communicate with the relevant institutions Simona explains that: “the institutions that should serve the citizen are dead for a very long time. The politization of the public administration killed the institutions, so we have no place to address issues publicly.” In such a setting of limited, almost no communication with the public institutions, much of the resistance cultivated in these years, found its channel out though diverse actions, creatively engaging the public and finding ways around the barriers of the system.



Gjorgje Jovanovik, Radio Free Skopje at the Montage/Mobile Gallery

5.2. From Symbolic Resistance to Political and Social Change

“With all the drama and cruelty outside, what kind of art can be the mirror or hammer of such a time?”²¹⁴

What is specific for the urban movements in Skopje, and hence it is presented as a separate theme, is that many of the activists reached for symbolic, artistic, creative tools as their method of operation. As an antipode to the project “Skopje 2014”, the level of protest art and other creative actions have risen dramatically. Since the project was executed through the medium of art and culture, many activists from the opposition were fighting back with similar methods. Hence, the creative forms that the resistance took were a reaction to the form of the public space occupation by the regime. The inability for the

²¹⁴ Lelovac, interviewed by author.

opposing opinions to be expressed through an institutional way, through media or in any other public form, made a necessity for the invention of new mechanisms and methods of communication. According to Filip, the only way left was out-of-the-box actions that would reach the public:

The system is pushing and the only way of reaction is this one, through different public performances which are sustainable. Things you don't need resources for, other than citizens' will and motivation. I believe it is a direct reaction to what Grujo²¹⁵ has done.

The creative actions are trying to influence the public space as "a hammer", in Filip's words. He relates this to theatre director Bertolt Brecht's concept of art as a hammer that shapes reality, instead of just a mirror reflecting. By going out of the assigned medium, according to Filip, any deed can become politically engaged. Thus, artistic activism, by exploring and creating alternative mediums for articulating needs and interests publicly, becomes a political act. Gjorgje believes that art became a major tool for activism, since it makes the reality unique and brings the citizens outside of the norm. He mentions the Radio Free Skopje that has an aim to initiate, wake up, activate and move around certain dogmas in the public space. The approach of the radio and other artistic projects he is involved in is less conventional, thus, he believes, they stick to people much more. As such, it grabs attention, plays with emotion, and communicates something which is impossible via traditional media, such as texts, manifestos and protests:

The creative process gives a feeling of specialness, uniqueness. There is something that makes you feel out of the pile, of the norm, the rules. For an activist to make a protest or write a text is conventional. Through a creative type of proclamation, you can say things that you cannot in another way.²¹⁶

Combining these two views it may be determined that creativity in activism can be politically effective since it breaks the norm; whatever the norm might be. Filip remarks that this type of activism can be understood on multiple levels. Some would understand the references and symbols while other would only understand it emotionally. It goes the same for any type of art. Hence, it is not always important if the political message is understood by all, but rather the ways in which the act can engage people emotionally. Due to the specific character art activism can be effective when combined with other methods. Filip believes that the reaction to the system must happen on multiple levels. One of them, he says, is excesses, which can be artistic ones, to more organized reactions. Andrej also believes that incorporating creative elements in activism contributes to more emotional communication and speaks of different effects that artistic activism can seek to achieve. He explains that the sharks in the river were a celebration of the madness and only served as a critique. "By the way they were created, their purpose was to only serve as sensation and, as such, they made a successful piece of work"²¹⁷, he elaborates.

²¹⁵ The interviewee uses a common nickname for the ex-prime minister of Macedonia – Nikola Gruevski

²¹⁶ Jovanovikj, interviewed by author.

²¹⁷ Anderj(pseudonym), interviewed by author, Skopje, April 19, 2016, translated transcript.

On the other hand, the eyes on the trees were more openly calling for a direct action – a more structural action working on preservation of the trees in the center. Few months after the eyes on the trees appeared, green activists started campaigns against the cutting of trees in Skopje. Even though a direct link between the actions cannot be evidenced, Andrej considers that if the artistic actions are successful, they can encourage further civil action. For him, public actions should not only criticize but, more importantly, they should mobilize.

Furthermore, the creative approach to activism is used also as a tool to gain visibility, attention and spark a debate on an issue. The “Singing Skopians”, for instance, received plenty of public exposure due to their style of performance. Their performances could be found on You Tube, or sometimes, in the pick of their popularity, on government media, where they were called anarchists, idiots, blasphemous acts and other offensive names, says activist Kristina. She claims that, even though most of the reactions were based on hate speech, it is important that they got public exposure. Though the impact of the choir cannot be measured, the fact that the choir provoked public reactions is an important accomplishment. “If nothing else, it grabbed attention”, recalls Kristina, explaining the funky clothes and accessories they were wearing in order to make heads turn to the performance. However, even if the choir was working on their performance, that was only a tool for spreading a political message. Kristina elaborates this point:

The choir was made and it functioned on the basis of the commitment of people who were, first and foremost, activists. Yes, there were many artists amongst us, but we were articulating our activist, political views. The singing was just a channel, and in that sense it wasn't so relevant.²¹⁸

Similarly, “Radio Free Skopje” also used the creative medium to address political issues. Thus, not only content such as theory of art, debates from the field of culture, poetry readings and radio-plays were streamed, but additionally, people had a chance to follow political content, satirical news, and interviews with activists and citizens. The radio produced a live show from the protests of the “Colorful Revolution” and other programs about it. Likewise, the “Mobile/Montage Gallery” hosted an exhibition of photographs from protestors on the streets of Skopje. Too add to that, the initiative “I love GTC” also openly supported the “Colorful Revolution” and called for their supporters to join the protests as the last effort resort for justice, freedom and the right to the city. As a consequence, these projects, besides being creatively engaging, they are dealing with political matters too. In that sense, urban activism in Skopje does not fully coincide with “politics of anti-politics” as a defining feature of urban activism in post-socialist cities.²¹⁹Yes, creative approach to activism (especially if it deals with local urban issues) is not explicit in its political engagement. Nonetheless, in the case of Skopje, the artistic actions are only

²¹⁸ Lelovac, interviewed by author.

²¹⁹ Jacobsson, “The Development of Urban Grassroots Movements in Central and Eastern Europe”.

serving the broader political and social atmosphere. What is more, the political climate in the country caused many smaller movements to join forces in the protests as a more direct political action. Kristina believes that the political conditions in the country were one of the reasons why the choir stopped performing:

The things are changing too fast, and it seems to me that probably we couldn't keep up. The political discourse because quite rough, so probably this type of alternative, peaceful actions could not have a reverberation that is strong enough.



For many activists, the “Colorful revolution” became a general outlet for an alternative expression, demand for the right to the city and political change:

Today while they were hitting with the color balloons I caught myself how I am observing the Arc of Triumph with great carefulness. I told myself; probably this is the only suitable art piece I would look with caution. To see all the things the people have written, how they intervened... Today, I can't go to the theater or the movies. The vibe for me is here. In principle, this is a correct artistic statement today. If there is any type of art, it should be conceptualized in a way that it could answer and counter the times.

In a certain way the “Colorful Revolution” is articulating the broader needs of the society and integrating the demands of different groups into one bigger and more radical movement. The struggles of the mobilizations presented in this chapter are quite diverse, both in their methods of working, as well as issues they are addressing. In that way they represent different sectors of civil society. In spite of that, they are still closely connected, both by sharing members, events, creating collaborations and friendships, but also by belonging to one wide network of urban, cultural and finally political resistance. Though all of the movements are using creative methods for expressing their views, their direct political engagement is undeniable.

5.3. The Urban Space – a Platform for “Political Becoming”

The change from one political system to another; the difficult transition since the independence from Yugoslavia in 1991; the anti-collectivism which followed the collapse of the socialist system; economic difficulties and low social capital are many of the reasons usually mentioned in respect to the passiveness of Macedonian citizens when it comes to dealing with issues of public character. Yet, the rise of activism in recent years, mainly in grassroots form, witnesses a change in Macedonian civil society.

On many levels, as shown by the four discussed themes, the rise of urban social movements in Skopje does follow some general trends as movements in other post-socialist cities in Europe. Nonetheless, while the examined literature refers to the rejection of the socialist past and the neoliberal city policies as triggers of such activism in the region; in the case of Skopje it is more an answer to the oppressive state policies. The case of Skopje is a specific example where the legacy of the socialist past is perceived as urban heritage by activists, as opposed to the nationalist ideals promoted by the government. Such example is not mentioned in the consulted literature on urban movements.

On another level, even though the trigger for the rise of urban activism may be different, there are noticeable similarities in their features and the social and political influence they seek to achieve. The right to the city is a leading value of the mobilization in Skopje which is easily relatable to the mobilization in the region, as indicated in *Urban Grassroots Movements in Central and Eastern Europe*. Similarly as in other post-socialist cities, activism in the city of Skopje is, in a way, confined to a battle for urban public space. The fight for the preservation of a building, a square or a tree, goes beyond the object that stimulated mobilization. Rather it is the rights of a group of citizens that identify with the urban narrative that has been jeopardized. In that sense, in the case of Skopje it is possible to speak of a culturocide happening as a side effect of the government policy.²²⁰ The obliteration of the urban heritage is an attempt to erase memories, meanings and values away from the public space of the city and citizens which identify with it. In order to confront this threat, most of the activists found their specific battle to be also a part of the anti-government protests.

In some post-socialist cities, grassroots urban activism had resulted in more institutionalized arrangements, such as collaborations with the local government. The case of Skopje does not intersect with the literature on this level, since communication between urban movements and public institutions has not been taking place. The failure of establishing certain communication between the public institutions and the civil society groups, pushed movements in Skopje into creating symbolic actions. The antagonistic public space where pluralism is not a prevalent value, can be seen a reason why most

²²⁰ Vaseva and Jovanovski, 111 Тезу За ГТЦ.

of the urban actions in Skopje happen in the realm of counterculture and engage art practices. Since pushed out from the public discourse, these activists were creating alternative channels to get their message across the public. Hence, a cause–effect relation between the policies of the conservative rule in Macedonia and the development of an urban culture of resistance may be suggested. Another reason for the development of urban movements in this case and a determining factor for the increasing use of artistic methods for activism is the project “Skopje 2014”. Due to the fact that the project was implemented through the means of art and culture generated high level of resistance via those same channels. Therefore, urban movements sought to re-appropriate and re-shape the public space through alternative artistic methods. In this way, the act of leaving their symbols in the city becomes as a political gesture. In that sense, we can speak of art activism as “a tactic” for political action from a marginalized position. This concept was touched upon in the literature on artistic activism:

Without a place of its own, a tactic operates in isolated actions, takes advantage of opportunities and depends on them, reacting immediately. Tactics are characterized by mobility, speed and smaller goals. De Certeau likens it to poaching: ‘It must vigilantly make use of the cracks that particular conjunctions open in the surveillance of the proprietary powers...It creates surprises in them...In short, a tactic is an art of the weak.’²²¹

Lastly, the most relevant gain for the community due to the rise of urban social movements is the empowerment of citizens. In the post-socialist scenery, where social capital is relatively low and public engagement is not common, the rise of grassroots activism serves as a platform for “political becoming”²²². In that sense, Filip claims that a real empowerment of the citizens has been achieved in this period:

In the long term, we managed to inspire, unite people, invent more methods to strengthen the civil society, and that’s very important. It’s shown the public that there is another way of thinking. Seven years ago, only a hundred people would show up to protests. Now the average is two to three thousand.²²³

Despite the fact that oftentimes the urban movements presented are small-scale and do not deal with political issues directly, they have introduced a concept of citizenship which is related to struggles concerning the most tangible political space, that is the city. In that way, urban mobilizations have affected the concept of active citizenship and participation in the public discourse. Correspondingly as in other cities in the region, the urban movements are advocating for the right to the city whether through symbolic battles, democratic mechanisms or direct political actions – such as protests. What they have in common is that, by using the city space as platform for social change, they negotiate the meaning of the urban space, raise the level of social capital, create networks based on solidarity and

²²¹ Popovski, “Spaces of Democracy: Art, Politics, and Activism in the Post-Socialist City”, 717.

²²² Jacobsson, *Urban Grassroots Movements in Central and Eastern Europe*.

²²³ Yanita Georgieva, “Fighting Art with Art: The Battle for Skopje,” *Euroviews*, April 19, 2016, accessed 13 June 2016, <http://www.euroviews.eu/2016/04/19/fighting-art-with-art/>.

develop a higher level of citizens' consciousness and proactiveness. What is more, local mobilizations in post-socialist space challenge the stereotype of a "weak" civil society.



This thesis opens further questions that will hopefully be addressed by other researchers with different methodological approach. In order to grasp more aspects of the problem, a similar study with quantitative research methods would be able to understand more dimensions of the same problem that were not touched upon in this thesis. For instance, one such approach would be researching the influence that the rise of activism has had on the broader public, by examining opinions of citizens quantitatively. Since this thesis was focusing on opinions and testimonials on activists which worked on political and social issues, it would be interesting to see the point of view of the "ordinary" citizen and contest the findings of this research. What is more, this thesis based its results on a limited sample of 10 units of analysis, due to time and resource restrictions. An analysis with a larger sample may be used to create a more general typology on urban social movements in Skopje in line with a similar theoretical framework as the one offered in this thesis. Finally, as this research was based only in Skopje, future research might explore the forms of activism taking place in other cities in Macedonia in comparison to the context and findings of this thesis.

Chapter 6: Concluding Remarks

This thesis had the objective to explore the different aspects concerning the rise of urban mobilizations in the city of Skopje, which use artistic methods in their engagement and through that intervene in the public space. The case study takes into account the political and social context surrounding the phenomenon, by framing the study in the period between 2010 and 2016, as years when the country of Macedonia was undergoing a challenging political period. The questions that the thesis addressed throughout the chapters were:

- What are the main aspects and triggers for the rise of urban mobilization in Skopje and in what ways are the urban social movements influencing the public space in Skopje in the period of political crisis?
- What is the position of urban social movements in the city of Skopje in regard to urban movements in other post-socialist cities in Eastern and Central Europe?
 - o in which aspects is activism in Skopje particular or similar in light of the literature on urban mobilization in post-socialist cities?
- Why are activists increasingly using creative activism when addressing public issues?
 - o how do these activists make sense of their actions?
 - o what kind of methods are they using and what are they seeking to achieve?

In order to answer the research questions, the starting point of this thesis was a review of the literature dealing with the concept of public space. The term “public sphere” by Jürgen Habermas was used to describe the political dimension of the concept and favors consensus as the highest point of the public deliberation. This term was contested in the theory chapter by the concept of agonistic spaces by Chantal Mouffe, advocating for an on-going debate and conflict as a precondition for democracy. Additionally, more contemporary theories on public space from an urban studies perspective were introduced, emphasizing the spatial aspects of public space as a necessary condition for political struggles. Scholars such as David Harvey and Peter Marcuse bring up urban movements such as the Occupy movements which made urban struggles a political debate and showed the deep tie between the city and social change. Along similar lines, the scholar on urban social movements Manuel Castells writes on the relation between urban mobilizations and social change. In

City and the Grassroot: A Cross-Cultural Theory of Urban Social Movements he identifies that “cities and space are the unfinished products of historical debates and conflicts involving meaning, function and form.”²²⁴ The urban mobilizations do not only concern the spatial dimension of the city, but they influence the broader social and political context in Kerstin Jacobsson looks at urban mobilization in

²²⁴ Castells, *The City and the Grassroots*.

post-socialist Europe through those lenses and analyses the influence of the social movements on the development of civil society in the region. The most prevailing themes from *Urban Grassroots Movements in Central and Eastern Europe* were adopted as a guideline for the research of this thesis, which had an aim of adding the rising urban activism in Skopje to the debate, as it was not a part of the above mentioned volume. In that way, this thesis was able to contribute the case of Skopje to the body of knowledge that already exists on the topic of urban social movements in post-socialist cities. Since this region encompasses great diversity, every singular case point towards some specific traits. To add to that, due to the particular theoretical framework, the case study of Skopje also has its place in the broader literature on the connections between public space, urban engagement and artistic interventions.

The methodology used to understand the case better was a qualitative case study with multiple embedded units of analysis. The explored case study was the rise of urban activism, with a specific focus on projects which make artistic interventions in the city of Skopje. Specific urban movements were looked at for the purpose of this research. The data was mainly collected through in-depth interviews with prominent activists, but a limited amount of field work was also done. The chosen methodology contributed for the problem to be answered in a declarative way, since the opinions of the activists whose work was analyzed was prioritized as data. As a result, their views on the subject matter were guiding the results presented in this thesis. Before delving into the analysis of the social movements, first a closer look of the conditions that caused them was looked at. The urban development of city of Skopje, through the lens of the theoretical framework was presented with an aim to better understand the use of public space in the local context. The research was framed in a loose timeframe between 2010 and 2016, as an estimated period of the political crises in the country. As implied by this thesis, the oppressive political climate in the country did play a major role in strengthening low-level, symbolic, grassroots activism, as an only possibility for the expression of public resistance. Moreover, the implementation of the project “Skopje 2014”, a particular project which is hard to compare to other urban interventions in the region, also contributed greatly to the rise of civic engagement in Skopje. This occupation of public discourse through the fields of art and culture, generated resistance in these same fields. The particular case of appropriation of public space from a position of power and its reappropriation through bottom-up engagements in the case of Skopje, relates to the broader understanding of the capacity of such actions to undermine the status quo. The rise of artistic activism in that process, when other civic instruments are inaccessible, leads to the conclusion that art, in times of political crisis, can create horizons for further political action.²²⁵

Through the theoretical framework and the empirical research, the transformative potential of urban activism was proven to go beyond the specific struggles by providing an arena for shaping

²²⁵ Boris Groys, “On Art Activism.”

political identities. This transformation occurs through a constant struggle in the realm of public space. As specified by Chantal Mouffe: “public spaces should be places for the expression of dissensus, for bringing to the floor what forces attempt to keep concealed.”²²⁶ Even though most of the outcomes from the rise of a particular kind of activism discussed in this thesis are not tangible, they do bring about social change in the long run. The experiences of activism, collaboration, victories and losses acquire a new sense of the place of the citizen in relation to the system, where he/she becomes an agent of change.²²⁷ In that sense, public space provides an arena for citizens to step out of the private space and step into the public one, to become visible, outspoken and, eventually, political.

²²⁶ Carpentier and Cammaerts, “Hegemony, Democracy, Agonism and Journalism.”

²²⁷ Jacobsson, “The Development of Urban Grassroots Movements in Central and Eastern Europe”.

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